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A Swift-Moving Crime Novel
By WILLIAM CHAMBERLAIN

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A Blackmail Novelet
By JOHN L. BENTON

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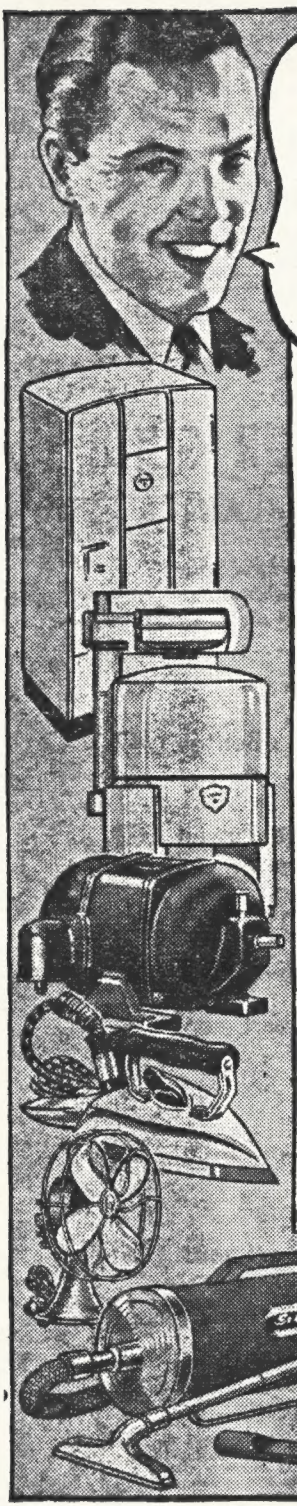

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Where readers, writers and the editor meet

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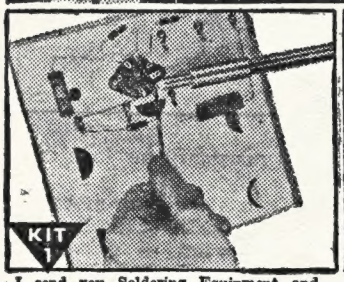

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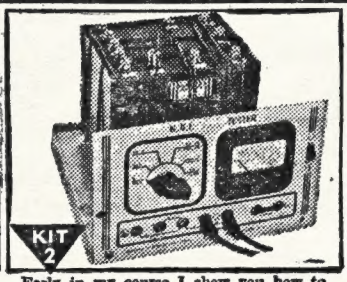

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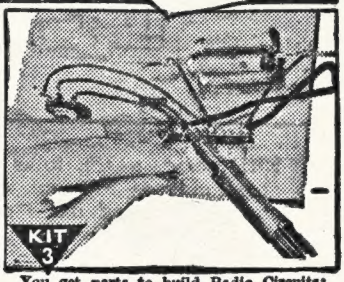

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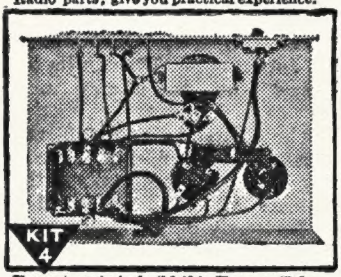

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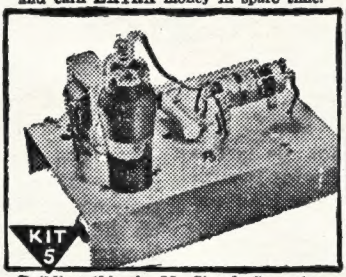

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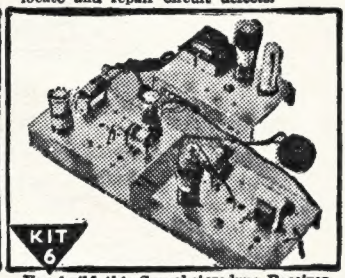

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HEADQUARTERS

Where Readers, Writers and the Editor Meet

HERE we go again, folks, with a great big splurge. For our next issue we have scheduled three complete novelets—and they're a trio of yarns you won't soon forget! Each one packed with mystery, excitement, thrills and action—yarns that will hold you breathless! Here's the first big headliner:

SIXTEEN POUNDS OF MURDER

By

CARL G. HODGES

To give you a tip—sixteen pounds is the exact weight of a bowling ball. And it is with this that the murder is committed. Unusual—well, just listen!

Dwight Berke has returned from the Pacific. His wife Gail is a typist, while he has a temporary assignment as a ghost-writer. Gail is expecting a "blessed event," and Berke advises her to give up her job.

Gail bravely offers to carry on for a while until Berke finishes the book he is doing with "Turkey" Shand, who is considered the champion bowler of the world. For this assignment, Berke is to get five hundred dollars.

The last thing Gail says to Berke on her way to the office is: "Look after Flash."

Berke knows Gail means Flash Jenkins, who has been Berke's pal throughout the late unpleasantness. Jenkins doesn't use a gun for a weapon. He uses a camera. That camera has photographed plenty of horror. The taking of those war pictures has shattered Jenkins' nerves, until the photographer is finding too much solace in the bottle. That is why Berke finds it necessary to "look after" Flask Jenkins.

Berke has an appointment that morning with Turkey Shand in room 610 of the Empire hotel. Jenkins doesn't want to go along, pleading "nerves". You see Jenkins has had an argument the previous night with Shand, over blond and beautiful Doris Cram. Jenkins knows that Shand had five thousand dollars on his person—five crisp bills fastened together with a paper-clip. Five bills of one-G each. Shand won the money in a bowling match.

Arriving at Turkey Shand's room, Berke and Jenkins knock on the door—but there is no answer. Berke hoists himself up on the transom and looks in. Mr. Turkey Shand is on the floor, very seriously dead. Berke goes downstairs in the elevator and brings up Horst, the house detective. In the room, they find the bowling champion's head has been bashed in with his own bowling-ball. There is only ninety dollars left of the five grand Turkey Shand had the previous night. Although he is considerably unnerved at the sight, Jenkins takes some pictures with his camera.

Inspector Fleming Morf now arrives on the scene. He is a blustering, officious know-it-all and is always followed by his cringing aides, Chuck Murphy and Clem Boone. Matters are further complicated by the discovery that the door of the room was locked, yet there is no key to be found.

When they take the now basketed body out in the hall, they meet the blonde, Doris Cram, on her way there. She screams something about "Who killed him?" Inspector

(Continued on page 94)

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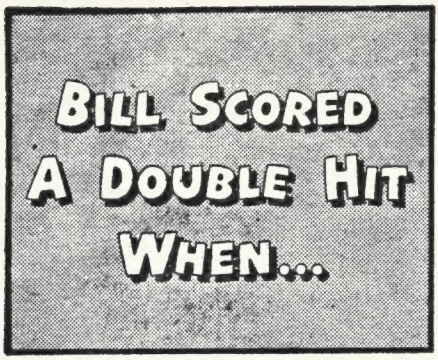
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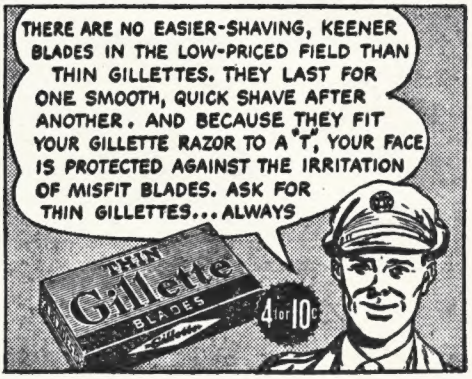
NONSENSE! CLEAN UP RIGHT HERE
KNOCK ON MY DOOR WHEN YOU'RE READY, DAD

WHAT A SMOOTH-SHAVING BLADE! MY FACE FEELS GREAT!
A THIN GILLETTE SHAVE ALWAYS PEPS A FELLOW UP

THEN IF YOU WENT TO DALTON CENTRAL HIGH, YOU MUST KNOW MY COUSIN KEN AMES!
I SURE DO. WE PLAYED FOOTBALL TOGETHER
HE'S CERTAINLY HANDSOME

WHEN YOU'RE ALL RESTED UP, BILL, DROP IN AT THE BANK. I HAVE SOMETHING THAT MAY INTEREST YOU
THANK YOU, SIR. I SURELY WILL
SHE'S A PEACH
SHOW UP WITH A THIN GILLETTE SHAVE, BILL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"Just keep your hands still, kid," Meester John said, and his gun was pointed right at me

Don't Forget Your Gun

By WILLIAM CHAMBERLAIN

Things pop fast and furious for Steve Handrahan when he tangles with black marketeers, kidnapers and gunnies in a rapid-fire melee that leads to the heart of a mystery!

CHAPTER I

The Girl in the Taxi

I CALLED Curt Whitson from a booth in the Union Station. It was three years since I had last seen Curt but his voice sounded just about the same as ever.

"Whitson speaking," he said. "Rags, bottles, old iron."

Curt always answered the phone that way. It was an example of his perverted sense of humor. He always said that it gave him time to think what he would say next. Since his caller was just as apt to be a member of Congress or a Cabinet member as not, the results were sometimes startling.

"This is Steve," I said.

"Steve who?"

"Steve Handrahan," I said. "Remember? The simple-minded wage slave who used to do all of your dirty little jobs for you, you

A SWIFT-MOVING CRIME NOVEL

whited sepulcher. I'm on my way out."

"Okay. I'll lock up the silver." Then Curt forgot himself a little and said, "It's darned good to hear your voice, boy. Are you all right?"

"Well, I've still got everything I left with," I told him. "Don't bother to send a car. I'll taxi out."

"Hah!" Curt said.

I found out what he meant by that when I tried to find a cab.

I told the starter that I wanted to go out Massachusetts Avenue. He looked down his nose at me and kept on saying:

"Pentagon—Pentagon. One more here for the Pentagon."

"What in thunder's the Pentagon?" I asked the man standing next to me.

He was a heavy-set man with a nose which was bent to one side. I didn't like his eyes.

"Where've you been for the last two years, bud?" he asked me.

"Australia, New Zealand, Christmas Island, Gaudalcanal, Manus, the Sandwich Islands, the—"

He gave me a mean look and moved away. That was all right with me, but I still didn't know what the Pentagon was. Then the cab starter had me by the arm.

"Massachusetts Ave? Right here, buddy."

He started to push me into a cab in which two people were already sitting. One was a girl with a nose that tipped up a little; the other was a bird with patent leather hair and a sneer. I thought that I had seen him somewhere before, then decided that I must be thinking of that feather merchant I had slugged one night in Brisbane.

"Look, chum," I said to the starter, "I want a cab all to my little self. I'm shy with people around."

He stared at me as though I was wearing war paint, and feathers in my hair.

"Bud," he said, "there's a war going on. Or hadn't you heard?"

I SQUEEZED in, feeling abashed. I could see that it was going to take me a little time to get used to Washington again. I hunched over so that I wouldn't be sitting entirely in the girl's lap. My shoulder twinged a little. It was that Jap bullet scratching itself on my shoulder blade, I guessed.

The starter shoe-horned a fat man into the front seat and away we went.

We went around the circle in front of Union Station and started down Louisiana Avenue. That wasn't the way I wanted to go, but I decided that I'd better keep quiet. They might make me get out and walk.

We turned into Pennsylvania and stopped at the Willard Hotel. The fat man got out. He paid for his ride and went off without leaving a tip. The taxi driver mumbled under his breath. We turned up 14th Street and the bird with the patent leather hair said he wanted to get out at M.

He kept looking at me as he paid his bill. I kept looking at nothing in particular. I wasn't going to get into trouble on my first night back in town.

Presently we turned left into Massachusetts Avenue. The leaves were beginning to come out on the trees and it was that time of evening when everything seems to be standing still. I sat back in my corner of the cab and looked at the girl. She looked straight ahead.

"My name's Steve Handrahan," I said toward the back of the cab driver's neck. "I've just been discharged from the army with character 'Excellent.' That's a very fine character."

She kept on looking straight ahead, but she didn't seem to be mad. I felt encouraged. She wore a blue suit with a white blouse that had a ruffle running down the front.

"When I was a little boy I had a dog named Pat," I said. "He had brown spots."

She grinned at that, and looked at me. Her face was even nicer than I had thought it was.

"When you were a little boy bashfulness wasn't one of your troubles, was it?" she said.

"It's just that I'm lonesome," I told her. "I've been wandering around through Borneo for the last ten months. The only people I had to talk to were head-hunters. After a while their conversation gets monotonous."

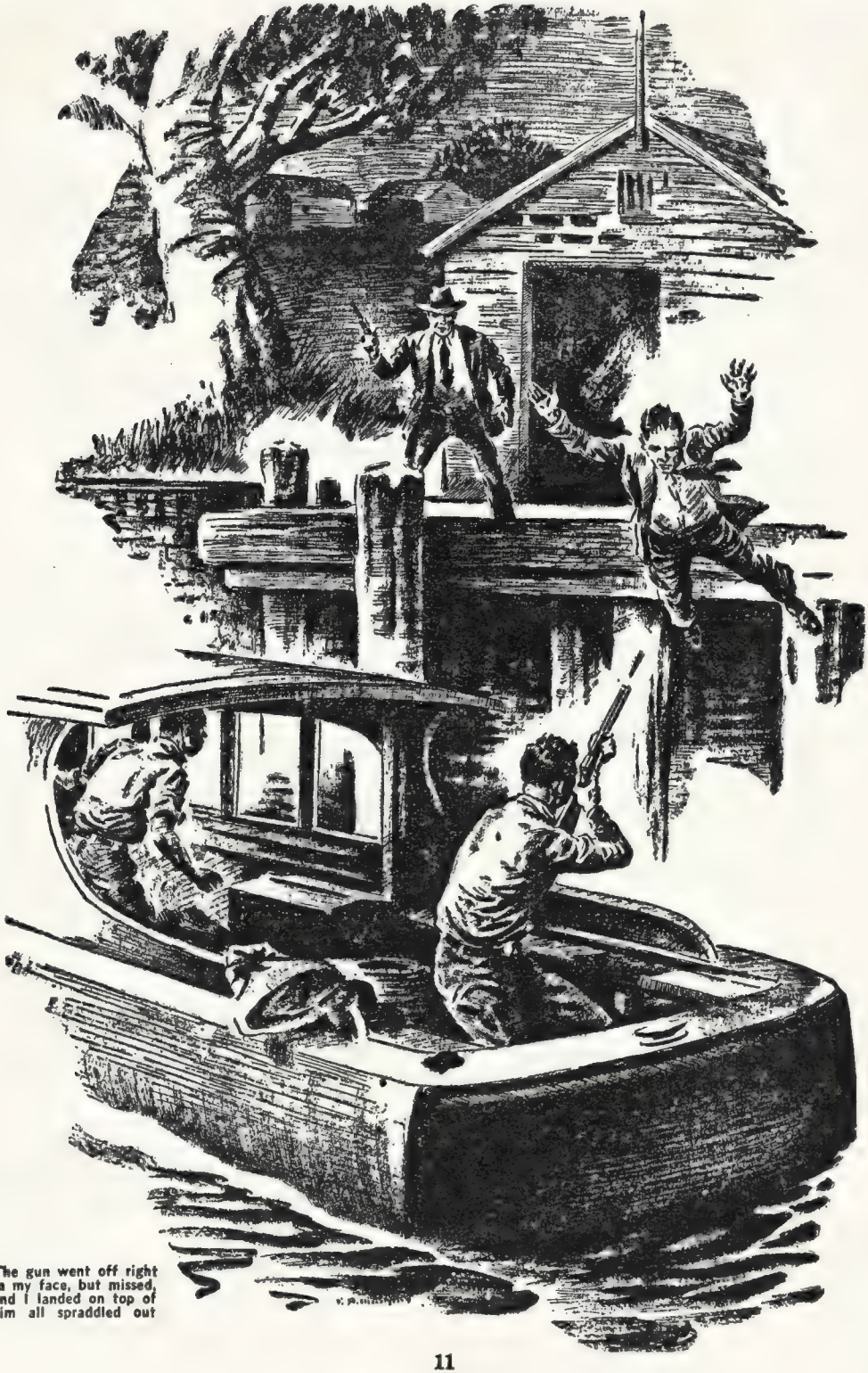
"What were you doing in Borneo?"

"I fell out of an airplane," I said which was the truth, more or less. I had bailed out when a wing of my B-24 had come off. It had taken me a long time to hitch-hike back to Morotai. "What's your name?"

She fielded that one nicely. "And you really didn't know what the Pentagon was?"

"Nice young ladies don't listen to the conversations of strangers," I said primly. "No, I didn't. The newspaper service is something fierce up in Borneo."

I thought that we were getting along swell.



The gun went off right in my face, but missed, and I landed on top of him all spraddled out

I was just about to tell her about my operation when I saw her smile freeze up. We were about halfway across the bridge over Rock Creek then, and the cab driver began to swear in a scared voice.

"Quit crowdin' me with that blasted hearse!" he yelled.

A black car about a block long and with a lot of chromium trimming on it had pulled up abreast of us. It was so close that the fenders were almost touching and, instead of passing, it stayed there.

The lad with the patent leather hair was sitting in the front seat with the driver. He stuck his head and shoulders out of the window and showed the cab driver the flat automatic in his hand.

"Turn down Rock Creek Drive," he said. "Don't try anything funny."

"Yes, sir," our driver said, with his teeth chattering.

We turned off Massachusetts to the right. The road was narrow and the big car dropped back to hang close on our tail. We passed the last of the houses and then there was nothing but a lot of trees. Being just back from Borneo I was sick of places with nothing but a lot of trees.

"What's it all about?" I asked the girl. "You're not carrying the crown jewels or the secret treaty, are you?"

She was sitting up very straight and her face was a little pale. I didn't blame her. My face was probably pale, too. She wasn't having hysterics, even if I had a hunch that a few hysterics might be in order.

"Something like that," she told me. "Will you do something for me—Steve?"

"I will," I said. "And he'll stay slugged, too."

"That's just what you mustn't do," she said to me in a low voice. "It won't help any, and it may cause a lot of trouble. Whatever happens will you promise just to sit tight and keep out of it?"

"No," I said.

SHE really looked scared then. Up in front the taxi driver was having a fit. We got to the bottom of the ravine and the big car pulled up and nudged us off into a little side trail which ran off into the brush for fifty yards or so. Then we smacked into a tree and stopped.

Having had a lot of experience in crack-ups, I leaned forward and tried to knock the front seat down with my teeth. The girl fell on top of me. She was soft and smelled of lilacs. I thought that it would be nice just to lie there and let her sit on me. Patent Leather didn't see it that way.

He came up and yanked open the door of the taxi. There was still enough light left to see the gun in his hand. I got myself turned around a little and saw that the big car had followed us into the brush. We were far enough in so that we were hidden from Rock Creek Drive.

"Almost got away with it, didn't you, sweetheart?" Patent Leather said. He had the kind of a voice I don't like. "Well, you come along. The Chief'll be glad to see you."

The girl pushed a hand against me and whispered something I didn't get. Then she got out of the taxi, pulling down her jacket and straightening her hat. Another man came up. He had a kind of face and a little mustache.

"I don't know what you're talking about," the girl said to Patent Leather.

"You will," Patent Leather told her. "Take her back to the car, Garcia."

"Yes, Meester John."

This Garcia took her arm and she went back with him, not protesting. I got myself all pointed together again and climbed out. The taxi driver was just sitting there, staring ahead. He was a big help to have along on a party like this. This "Meester John" stood a half dozen feet away and looked at me without saying anything.

"Okay," I said, going out of my way to sound nasty, "you can start any time."

"Start what?"

"Explaining. Then, after I've bounced you around a little, you can tell What-ever-his-name-is Garcia to drive the young lady and me back up to Massachusetts Avenue where we can catch another cab."

"Sort of like yourself, don't you?"

"I always have," I told him. "Curt Whitson brought me up that way."

I was watching him and I thought he started a little when I mentioned Curt's name. A lot of people do. Particularly people who go around poking guns at other people. I edged forward a little and wondered if that bum shoulder blade was going to bother me.

"Look, feller," this Meester John said, "if you're smart you'll beat it home and forget all about this. It's police business. You probably didn't know who the girl was, and we don't want to make trouble for you."

He pushed his left hand at me and I saw a small shield in the palm. I moved a little closer to look at it and let my mouth hang open.

"Oh," I said. "So that's the way it is, Officer."

He lifted one corner of his mouth at me. "That's the way it is. Now beat it."

Out of the corner of my eye I saw that the chauffeur was getting out of the big car and coming up to join the party. He was a beefy lad and was carrying something that could have been a jack handle.

"I sure appreciate you not wanting to make trouble for me, Officer," I sort of mumbled, and got my fingers around Meester John's right wrist.

His chin came in range and I pulled the trigger on my right hand. That fool Jap bullet spoiled my aim. I hit him just above the ear and, from the pain, I guessed I had broken a knuckle or two. It was enough to drop Meester John to his knees, though.

The chauffeur came galloping up and I thought I saw Garcia getting out of the big car. Quite a party, I thought. I yelled to the cab driver to take a hand but he must have had a wife and children at home, because he stayed where he was.

Meester John was getting up from his hands and knees when the chauffer and I tangled. The chauffeur swung the jack handle at me but I managed to get inside it and hit him in the Adam's apple with the edge of my left hand. It was a nice punch that I had learned down in Bougainville.

The chauffer said, "Uh!" and laid down.

Then Meester John dived at my knees and the two of us went down together. I rolled, and was about to put an elbow in his teeth when my head suddenly blew up with a million sparks.

CHAPTER II

Female Dick Tracy

WHEN I woke up I was lying on my back in a shallow puddle. It was completely dark now and I stayed quiet for a minute, trying to think where I was. A family of Swiss bell-ringers had moved into my head and were having a reunion for themselves. I had a lump the size of an egg where I part my hair.

I remembered then.

I got myself up, piece by piece, wondering why the devil I hadn't stayed in Borneo. The big car was gone. So was the taxi. So was everybody except me and Mr. O'Toole, the tame gremlin who used to ride with me in the B-24. I thought I had lost him in Borneo.

"O'Toole," I said, "this is your doing. Why didn't you stay at home where you belong?"

He just sneered at me. O'Toole isn't much of a talker.

"Well," I said, "what the two of us need is a drink."

He brightened up a little at that. I took my cigarette lighter and searched around in the bushes where the black sedan had been. I don't know what I expected to find—anyway, I didn't find it. I couldn't find my hat, either. Probably left it in the taxi, I thought. I found out afterward I was right about that.

"Well, O'Toole," I said, "let's get the heck out of here."

We went back up Rock Creek Drive to Massachusetts Avenue. I looked like a tramp. There was mud all over my nice gray suit and I had managed to split one leg of my trousers. O'Toole sneered at me some more.

"Stop that," I said, "or you won't get any water in your whisky."

After about ten minutes I finally managed to flag a taxi. I found out later that was practically a world's record for Washington.

Curt Whitson lives in a litttle shack of about thirty rooms set back from the Avenue and surrounded by enough land to start a farm. A big stone fence runs around the place. The taxi driver whistled as we went through the gate and toward the house.

"Boy!" he said. "What a dump! First time I ever been in here."

"A good thing for you," I told him. "There's a bad old ogre lives in there. He eats little girls."

I got out and paid him. He was looking at me as though he thought I was crazy, and I could see him mentally jotting down the lump on my head and my torn trousers. Then he took off down the driveway doing better than forty. That was all right with me. I was getting tired of taxi drivers.

I went up the steps and opened the front door. Mather came to meet me, looking as much like a stuffed shirt as ever. Mather fooled a lot of people. He looked like a movie butler but could be plenty handy with a pair of brass knuckles when he had to.

"Hello, Jeeves," I said. "The young master has come home."

"Well, blast my eyes!" Mather said.

Then we were pumping each other's hands up and down and slapping each other on the shoulders. Next to Curt, I guess I think just about as much of Mather as I do of anybody you can name.

"Where's his royal highness?" I asked after I managed to pry his hand loose.

"Waiting for you in the library," Bud Mather told me. "Which bar was it that you got thrown out of this time?"

"It's a long story," I said.

"There wouldn't be a girl in it?"

"There would," I told him pretty soberly. "A right nice girl, I think, Bud."

I meant that. I could still smell that lilac scent. And, from what I had seen of Meester John and his pals, they weren't the sort of company that young girls ought to have. Not young girls with turned-up noses, anyway.

I went on into the library. It was as big as a Chautauqua hall and lined with books. Curt was sitting in his big leather chair with a decanter, siphon and glasses on a low table beside him. He is sixty-two years old, with a brown face like an Indian's, and white hair which sweeps back from his forehead like a mane. He's got a pair of the hardest eyes you ever saw, and a kid's grin which takes the sting out of his stare when he wants it to.

Curt is Mister Big Shot to me any day in the week and I don't care who knows it. He picked me up off a Georgetown street corner where I was selling papers when I was ten years old, and has been the only father I've ever known. After I finished Yale I came back to Washington to be his secretary and man of all work. That work was unusual at times, but it was never dull.

I HAVE never known for sure just what Curt's position was. On the surface it wasn't connected with official Washington. Underneath, I have always thought that it was. Anyway, a lot of prominent people looked on Curt as a sort of trouble-shooter who could glue things back together when they became unstuck.

"Greetings, master," I said. "Your loyal servant has returned from the Indies."

Curt looked up and grinned. Then he waved his hand toward the leather chair which was waiting for me. I sat down and thought that it was good to be back.

"You look like the devil," he said. "Did you walk all the way from Morotai? Have a drink."

Curt was like that. I might just as well have been away over a weekend. I liked it. I poured out two drinks, took one myself and placed the other on the table.

"Who's that for?" Curt asked me.

"Mr. O'Toole," I said. I told him about my tame gremlin. "He held the B-24 up until I could get out. I have to humor him."

Curt nodded.

"I always ran to pixies myself. It's good to see you, Steve."

That practically amounted to mushy sentimentality for Curt. I appreciated it and drank down half of my whisky and soda while I wondered how to tell him about the girl in the cab.

It all sounded a little silly now.

"Describe her," Curt said, stretching out his long legs.

I did. Then I described Meester John and Garcia. Curt listened with his eyes half-closed. I had the impression that some of this made sense to him. Then I told him about getting sapped.

"Tch—tch!" he said. "Being off to the war has softened you up, Steve. You'll have to get used to living dangerously again."

"I don't want to live dangerously," I said in a rude voice. "I want to live in a monastery where I can look out of the windows and see the nice cows eating grass, and where I can listen to the little birds singing in the trees."

Mr. O'Toole was sulking over in the corner so I picked up his drink and drank it. He sulked some more. I put my hands in my coat pockets and looked at my bare knee which was sticking up through the torn leg of my trousers.

The fingers of my right hand touched a square of stiff paper in my pocket and I pulled it out. It was an envelope and it smelled of lilacs. It had Curt Whitson's name on it.

"Well, I'll be hanged," I said. "Now I'm a mailman. Or maybe Cupid's little messenger. Where did I get that?"

Curt reached for it and I gave it to him. Then I remembered how the girl had pushed her hand against me as she climbed out of the cab. Curt took up a nasty-looking stiletto and pried the flap of the envelope open. There was a sheet of paper inside. It had

"Yes" printed on it in block letters.

"H'm'm'm," Curt said. "I rather thought that your description fitted Jane."

"Who is Jane?" I asked, with my mouth open.

"A female Dick Tracy who does chores for me now and then. She was on her way here."

"When are you going to stop robbing the cradle?" I stormed at him. "What business have you got sending a kid like that out to consort with heels like this Meester John? Why, Curt, she was *nice!* You've got to get her out of this!"

Curt nodded. He had that flat, hard look in his eyes and I felt ashamed of myself. Curt never let one of his people down in his life.

"Jane was due here at nine, Steve," he said. "When she didn't come I knew something was wrong. I've got the wheels turning."

"What's it all about, Curt?"

"Black market. It's grown up into a healthy racket. The brains behind it are right here in Washington, but I haven't been able to put my finger on them yet."

"Where does Jane fit into it?"

"She picked up some information for me in New York. She's Jane Culver. Don't worry too much about her. She's used to taking care of herself."

I didn't believe that. Neither did Curt. I could tell that from the way the lines deepened a little around his mouth.

"How about Meester John?" I asked. "Is he the character you're looking for?"

Curt shook his head.

"He's just a journeyman. The man behind it has a front. He wouldn't annoy himself with details—unless we can get so close on his heels that he's got no other way out."

"Hang it!" I said. "I liked that kid, Curt. I can't just sit here with my finger in my mouth. Let's do something."

"What?"

SWEARING some at that, I drank my drink. Curt had contacts and they were busy at work trying to find out where the girl had been taken. In the meanwhile it wouldn't do much good to go galloping around the streets of Washington asking people if they had seen a thug with patent leather hair kidnaping somebody named Jane Culver.

I hit Meester John just above the ear, and it was enough to drop him to his knees

"Okay," I said sulkily.

My head was beginning to ache again and I fixed another drink. I heard the phone ring and Mather went to answer it. Then he came back and called Curt. I could hear the murmur of Curt's voice, but couldn't hear what was being said. Bud Mather came in then.

"The boss says for you to get a bath and into some new clothes—you look like the devil that way. I told Antonio to lay some out for you."

"Phooey," I told him. "I'm going to get a bath, period. Then I'm going to come down here and sit around in my underwear and drink bourbon whisky until I'm sleepy. Then I'm going to bed. I've had a busy day, little man."

"He wants you back down here dressed in fifteen minutes," Mather said sweetly. "Shall I come wash your back for you?"

"You shall not. Did Curt get some word about Jane?"

"Could be. And carry a gun."

"So it's that kind of a party, is it?" I said.

I was back down in the library in ten minutes. The bath had made me feel swell. The double brandy, which Antonio had fed me while I dressed, hadn't hurt any. Except for that lump on my head I was practically as good as new.

Curt was back in the library. A slender man in evening clothes was with him. Curt introduced him as a Mr. Joseph P. Bendix, a dollar-a-year man associated with one of the bureaus. I had read something about him in the paper coming down from New York. He was a lawyer from Detroit and he had made a speech denouncing black markets.

I shook hands with him. He had a firm handshake, but his eyes were set too close together to suit me exactly. His voice was cordial, but businesslike.

"Sit down, Steve," Curt said.

"What the devil! I thought—"

Curt waved his hand and we all sat down. Bud Mather, who does a lot of things besides buttle, came in and fixed drinks. I thought we were wasting time and began to get mad all over again.

"The police have found the cab you rode out in," Curt told me. "It was parked down by the canal. The driver had been shot through the head."

Bendix sipped his drink and looked shocked. I felt cold. Meester John and his friend, Garcia, meant business. I looked at Curt.

"Your hat was in the front seat beside him," Curt said dreamily. "They knew it was yours because it had your name in it."

"I told you I lost it."

"H'm'm'm," Curt said. "You didn't tell the police. So now they're out hunting you. Another cab driver reported bringing a fare here who looked as if he had been in a fight. So now the police think that this might be a pretty good place to do their hunting in."

"It reminds me of a news item I once saw," I told him sourly. " 'Headless Body of Man Found in Woods. Police Suspect Foul Play.' Well, what about it?"

Curt put the tips of his fingers together and looked at nothing in particular. Bendix sat up straight in his chair, tapping his fingertips up and down on the table. He was looking at the sheet of paper with "Yes" written on it.

"We're getting close to the head of this black market mob," Curt said. "It might spoil things right now if the police found out about Jane being kidnaped. They'd probably start investigating. It might tip our hand."

"Police are funny that way," I murmured. "I should have stayed in Borneo. Life is simpler there."

Bendix looked at me with a quick, bright glance. I decided I didn't like him. I thought that he was probably the sort of man who had a dowdy wife and made passes at his stenographers.

"So I'm going to hide you out for a little while, Steve," Curt said. "Bendix, here, has a place over in Virginia. His wife's in New York and he's not using it right now. His chauffeur will drive you over. Stay there until you hear from me."

"A fine home-coming," I said. "I haven't been here three hours yet and already I'm a fugitive from justice."

Mr. O'Toole sat over in his corner and sneered more violently than ever. He seemed to be enjoying it.

"You will have nothing to worry about at my house," Bendix said. "The police would never think of looking there."

"Steve is not scared," Curt pointed out. "He can't shake off his Army habits. He has to beef about everything. He'll get over it in a few more days."

"If I get plenty of beef," I said. "But I thought the black markets had it all."

CHAPTER III

Night Callers

BENDIX had a big Packard. I got in front beside the chauffeur and we started out. The chauffeur was a thin gee with a little mustache. I tried to talk to him but he only grunted, so I gave it up after a while.

We went down Reservoir Road until we hit Canal Road. Then turned right and paralleled the Potomac until we hit Chain Bridge. The river was a little high, I noticed. A half-moon was up and there was enough light to see fairly well.

We crossed into Virginia and the road twisted up a long hill, then fell away to the left into heavy woods. After a while there weren't any more houses.

"When do we see the Indians?" I asked the chauffeur.

He didn't seem to think it was funny. I lit a cigarette and slouched over in one corner of the seat and amused myself by thinking up new and insulting names for Mr. O'Toole. Then I wondered where the girl with the lilac perfume was, and hoped she was all right. I had enough confidence in Curt to believe that she was. Still, I hadn't liked the faint shadow of worry that had been in Curt's eyes.

We crossed a little bridge and then the chauffeur eased the Packard between stone posts and into a driveway which twisted through the trees. A little moonlight came through and I could see concrete benches, modeled on the Roman pattern, scattered here and there. There was a big swimming pool built like a fish pond but empty now. Then we came to the house which was built in layers against a little hill.

The chauffeur stopped the car.

"This is it," he said.

"Nice chauffeurs say 'sir'," I told him.

He looked at me as though he would like to take a bite out of my throat, but it didn't bother me any. I climbed out, brushing my pocket with my hand to make sure the gun was still there. I was beginning to think that there was something all wet about this. I had worked with Curt Whitson long enough to know that there was a pattern behind it, though. Curt didn't work on a hit and miss basis.

"You can go, Oswald," I said. "I won't need you any more tonight."

"Some day you're going to be too smart for your own good, smoothie," he said.

"No doubt. Good-by, Oswald."

He said a naughty word and drove off, leaving me standing there looking at the house. It wasn't awfully big—not more than a dozen rooms, I guessed. It was built up with a stone terrace a dozen feet above the driveway. All of the windows were dark.

I went up the steps to the stone terrace and let myself into the front door with the key Bendix had given me. There was a little hall inside and I found the light switch. Beyond, there was a big living room with lots of windows and deep chairs. I turned on all of the lights and wandered around a little, looking the place over. A clock on the mantlepiece said that it was eleven-thirty.

"Maybe some of the neighbors will see the lights and come over to call," I thought. "I could use company."

Mr. O'Toole laughed sardonically at that. He knew as well as I did that there probably wasn't a neighbor within three miles. This Bendix bird apparently liked his solitude.

A broad stairway led up so I climbed it, switching on lights as I went. Closed doors led to bedrooms and I chose the nearest one. I would, I thought, find a place to sleep first. Then I would browse around and find a drink for Mr. O'Toole and myself and listen to the radio for a while.

I opened the door and clicked on the light.

"Just stand right there," a woman's voice said. "I'm a good shot."

A blonde was sitting up in the middle of a big bed pointing a little nickel-plated pistol at me. She was around thirty, with blue eyes and a pretty face if you like the show girl type. The nightgown she wore didn't leave much to the imagination. I was more interested in the muzzle of that gun. It didn't leave much to the imagination, either.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," I said. "I must be in the wrong county."

I wanted to kick myself back down the stairs. The next thing she would do would be to reach for the phone on the stand beside the bed and call the police. Then Curt's plans would all go up the stack. I tried to think of some argument that would keep her from calling.

"Imagine finding you in," was the best I could manage. "I thought the place was empty."

She still hadn't reached for the phone. Instead, she pulled the sheet up around her neck and just sat there looking at me over the barrel of the gun.

"What do you want?" she said.

I DECIDED to tell a part of the truth. It couldn't make things any worse.

"Look," I said, "I didn't mean to bust in on you this way. I just got into Washington tonight. I didn't have any place to stay. Mr. Bendix offered to let me stay here for the night. He said his wife was away. He even sent me out in his car."

She stared at me a little while longer. I stared back at her and hoped that she thought I had an honest face. Apparently she did, because she put the gun on the telephone table and folded her arms around her knees. I began to breath again.

"The big heel," she said bitterly. "If he'd pay a little more attention to where his wife is these things wouldn't happen."

"That's the trouble with me," I said.

She began to look interested. I decided to keep up my clowning. I couldn't keep away from the idea that Curt had more in mind than just hiding me from a police inquiry when he had sent me out here.

"Where do you keep the St. Bernard?" I asked.

She wrinkled her forehead at me. Now that she had got rid of the gun I was beginning to think that she was prettier by the minute.

"St. Bernard?"

"The one with the keg of brandy around his neck. I've never been on an Alp but, if I ever do get on one, I'll never need a drink more than I need one now."

She laughed at that.

"What's your name?"

"Steve Handrahan. I'm simple-minded but harmless."

"Go on down until I get something on. Then we'll have a drink. I'm Sylvia Bendix."

I went down and wandered around the living room. It was expensively furnished. I turned on the radio but nothing much came out so I turned it off again. After a little Sylvia came down the stairs. She was wearing a long, peach-colored negligee and mules, and she looked nice.

I said so.

She told me where to find bourbon and ice and soda, and I carried them in and put them on a low table. She sat and smoked a cigarette while I mixed us each a drink.

"I thought you were in New York," I said, handing her a glass. She looked at me out of the corners of her eyes.

"Are you sorry I'm not?"

I thought, so that's the way it's going to be, is it? Mr. O'Toole scowled and jerked his thumb toward the door. I didn't pay any attention to him. I got a cigarette burning and went over and sat down beside Sylvia on the couch.

This thing was beginning to look crazier and crazier to me. I had to find out whether she was here accidentally or on purpose, so I started to do a little discreet pumping. She had the same idea, so we didn't get far.

"I suppose your husband will be surprised when he learns that you're home," I said.

"I don't care what my husband is surprised about," she told me. "Besides, he won't find I'm home. He'll find that I've gone to Reno tomorrow."

"I've heard they've got a nice climate in Nevada."

"Why do you always have to talk in circles?"

"My mother was scared by a merry-go-round," I said.

She made a face at me and leaned forward to punch out her cigarette. That negligee wasn't fastened any tighter than the law allows. I put in my time looking at the clock on the mantlepiece. It was a quarter to one.

Then I went back to my prying.

"Did your husband expect you back tonight?"

Her eyes suddenly hardened suspiciously and she put down her glass.

"Listen, Steve, or whatever your name is, there's something mighty funny about all this."

I said there was, at that.

"Well, I want to know what it is right here and right now," she said. "Are you a detective? It would be just like that rat to have put a detective to following me!"

I told her I wasn't a detective but just a poor dumb soldier home from the wars. It took two more drinks and a lot of coaxing, but finally she believed me. Also she spilled a lot of miscellaneous information which added up to something like this.

JOSEPH P. BENDIX was a big heel who didn't understand her. He had never understood her. Anyway, she didn't like the

way he combed his hair. In New York she had met a character named Ray St. John who was wonderful. He understood her. She liked the way he combed his hair. So she was going to Reno and get a divorce and a lot of alimony. Then she and this Ray St. John would get married and live happily ever after.

I had heard better stories.

I fixed another drink and wondered what I did now. Joseph P. Bendix was likely to be upset if it got out that I had spent the night out here with his ever-loving wife.

I decided to call Curt and ask him what I did next. Then I decided that the evening was still young and there was plenty of time to call Curt in. That was where I made my mistake.

Sylvia looked at me out of the corners of her eyes.

"You want to know something, Steve?" she said.

I said sure, I was always glad to know something.

"I was scared to death to stay here alone. I'm glad you just sort of happened in. Now, what do you think of that?"

"Plenty," I said. "Only Mr. O'Toole doesn't approve. He's scowling at me something awful."

She looked around quickly and her eyes got suspicious again.

"Who's Mr. O'Toole?"

So I told her. She laughed.

"You're cute, Steve," she said. "Kiss me." And she fell across my lap.

I was kissing her when I heard a door close softly out where I had gone to get the ice. I wasn't any more scared than if a sixteen-inch gun had gone off under the couch. I got up, dumping Sylvia on the floor where she yipped a couple of times as I reached for the gun in my pocket. I didn't get it out.

"Just keep your hands still, bozo," somebody said.

Meester John, the monkey with the patent leather hair, came in sneering at me. Garcia was with him. Meester John had that automatic in his hand again and it was pointed right at my middle. For a really peaceable gee, it seemed to me that I was getting pointed at with a lot of guns tonight.

"Well, well," I said. "It looks like we're going to have quite a party. Won't you sit down?"

"Shut up, you," Meester John said. "Garcia, get that gun away from him."

This Garcia simpered at me from behind his mustache and started to tippy-toe forward like a fat cat. I didn't like him. I didn't like Meester John, either.

I was just wondering what I ought to do about it when Sylvia took the play away from me. She had got back to her feet and now she walked haughtily toward Meester John, wearing her Queen Elizabeth cap.

"Just what's the big idea, Ray?" she demanded. "I told you not to follow me down here."

Meester John gave her a dirty look, but he didn't say anything. I edged myself a little to one side so that I was clear of the couch. Sylvia put her hands on her hips and wiggled herself a little and jerked her chin at Meester John.

"Just because I played around with you a little in New York doesn't mean you can come down here and break into my house. If Joe ever found out about this, you know what it would mean."

"Shut up, Sylvia," Meester John said. "I

[*Turn page*]

didn't follow you down here. I thought you were still in New York. I came out here to have a talk with that bozo you were necking."

I added it up, then. This Meester John was the Ray St. John that Sylvia was going to live happily ever after with when she came back from Reno. It didn't look like their little romance was off to a good start, and I thought I might as well make the most of it. Sylvia helped.

"I'll neck with whom I please, you little heel!" she said, and started for him.

I got my fingers around what was left of my highball and heaved it, glass and all, at Meester John's face. It missed him but got Garcia right on the mustache. The soda siphon was handy so I grabbed that and waded right in.

It was a nice fight while it lasted.

CHAPTER IV

Trapped

I DREAMED that I was sitting on one of the white leather benches in the lobby of the Lennon Hotel in Brisbane. There were a lot of people around but nobody that I knew. I was looking for someone but they didn't come. Then a pretty girl, wearing a fur coat, came up and spoke to me.

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" she said.

I said why, and she said why not? So I got up and went with her out into the street. We looked at things in the windows. I wanted a safety razor so we walked through miles of shops looking for one. I finally bought one for two shillings six. That was too much for a safety razor and it made me sad.

When I got out of the shop I saw the girl a block ahead. She was walking fast and I hurried to catch up with her. I saw her going through the Marble Arch and into Hyde Park in London, but when I got there she had disappeared.

I stood in Hyde Park and listened to a little duffer who was up on a step-ladder. He had a head like a coconut and nobody was listening to him but me. I wanted to hear what he said but I couldn't because he kept climbing higher and higher up the step-ladder. As he climbed, I kept tipping my head back so that I could look at him.

The sun bothered me. It was shining in my eyes and made my head ache. Finally the man had climbed so high that he was just a speck and then I heard what he was saying.

"Snap out of it, you!" he was yelling down at me.

I opened my eyes just as somebody dumped a bucket of water over me. That made me mad and I decided that I'd climb up the step-ladder and get that palooka. Only there wasn't any step-ladder now—just a table and a couple of chairs in a bare room.

I was lying on a cot. A single, bright light bulb hung down from the ceiling just over my head and I had been staring up into the light. I felt like I'd been run over by a tank.

"Give him some more water," somebody said.

Niagara Falls hit me in the face again and slapped me back to my senses. I managed to get my feet to the floor and sit up. Two men I had never seen before were in the room with me. One was a big thug with a water bucket in his hand. The other was a nice, gentlemanly looking torpedo who sat in one of the chairs while he worked at his nails with a nail file.

"Okay, Slim," he said. "He's awake now. Go tell Ray."

"Slim" grunted and went out. I heard the key rattle in the lock behind him. I pried my eyelids open with my fingers so I could see better, and took inventory. What I saw didn't make me very happy.

I was in a room perhaps twenty feet square. There weren't any windows, so I guessed that it probably was in the basement. The only furniture was a wash bowl fastened to the wall, the bed, a table, two chairs and this Groton-Harvard-looking mutt sitting in one of them. He looked at me, and I looked back.

I felt terrible. My tongue tasted as though the Russian Army had marched across it in their stocking feet. My head felt about twice too big and my face was all twisted out of shape. Groton-Harvard looked sympathetic.

"Feeling better, old chap?" he asked.

"No," I said. "What goes on here, anyway?"

He put away the nail file and brushed daintily at the knees of his trousers. I thought of telling him that he looked pretty, but decided that I wouldn't. I still had all of my teeth yet.

"Not much right now," he said. "I expect that as soon as the boss gets back we'll

bounce you around a little just to see what you know."

"Maybe I'll have something to say about that," I told him, as nastily as I could through a split lip.

He yawned and raised his eyebrows at me. "Maybe," he agreed.

The conversation kind of died down. I sat and listened for footsteps outside the door and tried to figure just what I had bumped into. I was beginning to think it wasn't just accident that I was here in Joseph P. Bendix's basement. It wasn't just accident that Meester John and Garcia and my Groton-Harvard friend were here, either. I had a hunch, and decided to give it a play.

"Look," I said, "maybe I can diagram it. It'll help to pass away the time. You think I know too much about your little racket in black beefsteaks. So you're going to slap me around to see how much I know. When they finally find my body everyone will think that I fell into the Potomac while fishing. Right?"

He beamed at me.

"You're an intelligent little rascal," he said.

I FELT cold all over and wished I was back in Borneo. I wasn't kidding myself any. These birds were in it right up to their necks, and they couldn't afford to take chances.

"How about Jane?" I said then. "I don't suppose you'd be above giving her the same working over you've given me."

Groton-Harvard looked shocked.

"We wouldn't think of mussing a woman up like that, old chap. A little persuading with a rubber hose, perhaps. But no baseball bats or—"

I got to my feet and staggered toward him. My legs felt like rubber and I was having trouble trying to focus my eyes. He got up lazily out of his chair, hit me on the chin, hit me twice in the stomach, then kicked me when I lay down on the floor. After that he picked me up under the arms and dragged me back over to the cot.

"Now, now," he said. "You mustn't get all upset and nervous."

He sat down in the chair and began to work on his nails with the nail file again. I lay there and tried to get my breath back while I kept my eyes closed and pretended that I was out. I didn't have to pretend any too hard.

Five minutes went by, and then another five. I wondered what time it was getting to be. My scrambled brains were beginning to lie down and behave themselves again when I heard feet come padding along the hall outside. A key rattled in the lock. Groton-Harvard twisted around in his chair a little and slid his right hand inside the front of his coat.

Slim put his head in through the door and Groton-Harvard relaxed.

"Look, Frankie," Slim said in a worried voice, "I can't find the boss. I think he's took a powder on us."

So Groton-Harvard's name was Frankie, I thought. It still didn't make me like him any better. He got up out of his chair and went to the door and his face wasn't so pretty now. Slim's suggestion didn't seem to please him much.

"What gave you that idea?" he wanted to know.

Slim said something I couldn't hear. Then Frankie said a naughty word and came back to the cot and looked at me. I played dead. He hauled me up by the front of my shirt, clipped me another on the point of the chin and then let me drop back. That clip started the little birdies to singing again but I've got a tough chin and didn't go out this time. I put another black mark opposite Frankie's name in my little book, though.

"He'll keep," Frankie said in a mean voice. "Now you and I will go down and have a nice little talk with Ray. He can't tell me he didn't know that woman was going to be here. She's going to get us all in the glue yet!"

The two of them went away, locking the door. I waited for five minutes after I couldn't hear the sound of their footsteps any longer. It didn't take any seventh son of a seventh son to guess that my next play was going to have to be good because I was only going to be allowed about one more try in this league.

I sat up pretty slow and held my head in my hands until the room stopped going around. Then I managed to get myself across the floor to where the wash bowl was. It was a longer hike than the one I had made coming back out of Borneo.

I drank a little water and soused my head, then drank some more water. That made me feel better. Then I went back and lay down on the cot again and did a little heavy thinking. Mr. O'Toole climbed up and sat on the foot of the cot and looked at me sympa-

thetically for a change. It probably strained him.

"Mr. O'Toole," I said, "either by accident or design we've fallen into a den of thieves. All in all it's a messy business. It could even prove fatal."

He clicked his tongue and nodded.

"Maybe if we can figure out how it happened we can figure out what to do."

Mr. O'Toole nodded again.

"Sylvia Bendix gets herself mixed up with a lad in New York who is handyman for a black market ring. She tells him about this place which is hidden out in the woods and vacant most of the time. It sounds to Meester John like a likely place for a murder or two —particularly since he's got somebody on his hands who knows too much. So Meester John and his little playmates bring the murderee out here and what do they find?"

MR. O'TOOLE got that smug I-told-you-so look on his face and I kicked him off the cot and went on estimating the situation. He climbed back, looking sorry.

"They find Steve Handrahan bussing little Sylvia so they add him to their collection. And why don't they scragg this Steve Handrahan and be done with it? Because they're waiting for the big boss to show up and put his okay on the work order. That's why, my snide little friend."

I got up off the cot and limped across to the wash bowl again. The water tasted even better than it had the first time. I decided that I had never really explored the possibilities of water as a beverage before. The rubber was going out of my legs now and I walked back and forth to get the circulation going.

"Now Curt Whitson wants to know who this big boss of the black market is so that he can put the finger on him. Also Curt suspects that Joseph P. Bendix's Virginia house is being put to no good purpose. And why would that be?"

Mr. O'Toole shrugged his shoulders and I gave him a hard look.

The table was a flimsy bit of furniture but it had nice legs. I tipped it over and broke one of them off. Then I righted the table and pushed it against the wall so that it would stand up. Having that table leg made me feel better.

"Maybe it was the note that I brought him," I went on. "Maybe it was something else. Anyway, if Curt sent us out here with malice aforethought, it's a cinch that he and Bud Mather and maybe others are snooping around here somewhere. At just the right moment they'll come galloping in like the United States cavalry after the Indians."

Mr. O'Toole sneered, and I got the point.

"Oh, all right," I said. "Have it your way, you blasted little spook. We'll get out of here all by our own little selves just in case the United States cavalry is held up. Besides, I want to make the acquaintance of that lilac perfume again."

I knew that I was doing some fancy whistling in the graveyard but I had to do something. Presently I had another drink of water and hoped that it wasn't going to get to be a habit. My watch said a quarter to three. I had the great granddaddy of all headaches, but except for that I felt pretty good again.

I prowled the room over carefully and what I found didn't cheer me up much. I was locked in and no mistake. The door was made of oak and thick, and it was fastened with a nice new Yale lock. There weren't any windows. So I gave up prowling and went back and sat on the cot again while I wondered what had happened to Jane Culver.

My thoughts were not pleasant.

It was while I was thinking of her that I heard the scream. It was a woman's scream and it wasn't loud, but it was enough to raise the goose pimples all over me.

I waited for it to come again but it didn't. The sound of two muffled shots came instead.

CHAPTER V

Quick Thinking

JUST as I was about to start to work on the door with my table leg I heard the sound of footsteps coming down the hall outside. They were coming fast. I got myself over against the wall so that I would be hidden by the door which was hinged so that it opened inward.

The key scraped against the lock and then the knob turned. Slim, the big gorilla who had baptized me with the water bucket, slid into the room and kicked the door shut behind him. He had been expecting trouble, I guess, because he was carrying a blackjack that was as big as a milk bottle.

"Hello, Slim," I said, and swung my table leg.

I had meant to knock him out of the park, but he was fast for a big man and he jumped back so that I clouted him over the knuckles instead. He yelled and dropped the blackjack.

He went for a gun with his left hand and I stabbed him in the teeth with my table leg. It was what old Sergeant Cravens had fondly used to call "the long thrust" back in basic training when he was trying to teach me bayonet fighting. If there had been a bayonet on that table leg I would have pinned Slim to the wall like a butterfly on a card.

As it was, he sat down on the floor and began to spit teeth. I took the gun out of his shoulder holster, then went over and picked up the blackjack.

"Won't you come over and sit on the cot so we can talk?" I said politely.

Slim lisped some bad words at me through his missing teeth, so I slapped him a little with the blackjack. He got up and sat on the couch.

"Where's Miss Culver?" I said.

Slim said some more bad words and ended up by telling me to go to a certain hot spot. I went over to the door, opened it, took the key out of the lock, closed it, locked it, and came back to stand in front of Slim again.

I dangled the blackjack back and forth, about three inches from his face.

"Where's Miss Culver?"

He looked at me sullenly, and I decided to break his nose with the sap. He must have read my mind.

"Aw," he said sourly, "why should I front for that bunch of heelth? She's in a room on the top floor."

"Where are Meester John and Frankie and all of the rest of your little pals?"

"Up front. Where we picked you up."

"Who was that I heard screaming?"

Slim suddenly looked scared. "I don't know, boss. I thwear I don't know. I wath on my way down here when I heard it."

"What were you coming down here for?"

"Frankie told me to come get you."

"Why?"

Slim shuffled his feet and looked at me out of the corners of his eyes as he spat out another tooth. He was scared to talk and scared not to talk.

I flipped the blackjack up and down in my hand and stared at him.

"Look," he said, "are you a cop, boss?"

"It could be," I told him. "If I'm not I'll do until a cop comes along. Maybe you've got something you'd like to spill?"

"I didn't figure on no murders," he said suddenly. "Frankie said thith wath just a little racket where we could pick up thome quick dough. I ain't never been mixed up in no murders before, boss."

I got tired of listening.

"If you're going to sing you'd better sing fast, Caruso," I told him. "Otherwise they'll probably be strapping you onto an electric griddle one of these days."

That really scared him and he talked. There was a cabin cruiser tied up in a little cove down on the river, he said. I was slated to take a ride down the Potomac, and I wasn't slated to ride back. Slim thought that the girl was supposed to go, too. He didn't know for sure.

"Who's the head of this racket?" I asked him.

He shook his head.

"I don't know, boss. I thwear I don't know. St. John is the gee Frankie gets his orders from."

I thought he was probably telling the truth. Anyway, I didn't have time to knock it out of him.

"Roll over on your face and play dead," I told him, "if you don't want me to play tunes on your skull with this overgrown sap."

I tied him up with his necktie and my own. Mine was a green one Curt had given me for Christmas four years ago. I was glad to get rid of it.

Then I went out into the hall, locking the door behind me.

THERE was a short passage which bent at right angles ahead. I followed it and it emptied out into a basement with a furnace and washtubs and some garden hose coiled above a work-bench. A yellow light bulb hung down from a cord and, at the far side of the basement, a short flight of steps led up to a door. I went on across to the steps, not wasting any time.

The door was unlocked and I pushed it open a little and listened. I could hear voices, but they were muffled and seemed to come from quite a distance.

"Well," I thought, "you can't stand around here all night with your finger in your mouth, son. Come on and be a hero, Handrahan."

I pushed the safety off Slim's automatic and slid through the door. I was in the kitchen. I stepped out into the middle of the room, walking as though the floor was covered with eggs—thin-skinned eggs. Something clicked suddenly behind me and then started to growl. I almost broke my arm waving the gun around and my heart climbed up into my windpipe and started to choke me.

It was the electric refrigerator which had started up.

I went over and sat down on a stool and wiped the sweat off my forehead while I called Curt every name I could think of. Then I made up some I had never heard before. I felt better after that.

There was a ham on the kitchen table, so I made myself a sandwich and ate it while I got my nerve back. After all there wasn't any hurry about charging out into the front part of the house looking for a fight. I found some brandy in a cupboard, too, and after a little I felt still better.

I could still hear voices up in the front part of the house and guessed that I had better get started. Pretty soon Frankie and Meester John would begin to wonder what had happened to Slim. They weren't going to like it, either, when they found him tied up in Curt's Christmas tie.

I had another drink of the brandy and opened the swinging door which led out of the kitchen. I hoped that there were some back stairs around here somewhere.

There were. I went up them to the second floor, then found some more stairs and kept on going up. It was pitch-black ahead of me and I had to feel my way, keeping a hand pushed out in front of me. I found a door at the head of the stairs and it wasn't locked.

"Handrahan," I said, "you're doing splendid. You ought to go in for this more often."

I closed the door, felt around until I found a light switch and snapped it on. I was in a little hallway, I saw, with two doors opening off it, one on the right and one on the left. I flipped a mental coin and picked the one on the left.

The room was empty. So was the first one on the right. The next door was locked and I guessed that it was the one.

I put my mouth up close and said, "Jane!"

Nothing happened, so I tried to it again. Then I heard a faint noise as though someone was bouncing up and down on bed springs and guessed that it was Jane all right. She was probably tied up like an Easter basket and gagged so that she couldn't answer. Which was all just dandy since she couldn't get out and I couldn't get in—not without an ax, at any rate.

"This is Steve Handrahan," I said. "The sap who didn't know what the Pentagon was. Bounce the bed springs if you can hear me."

I listened and the bed springs bounced.

"I'm going back downstairs and get something to open up this coop with. Just sit tight until I get back. I'll leave Mr. O'Toole with you."

The bed springs bounced harder. I didn't think it was necessary to tell her that Mr. O'Toole was a bald-headed spook with no brains at all. She'd probably think that he was tall and blond and handsome, and he would be company for her until I got back. I had a hunch that Jane could use some company of the right sort for a while.

"Mr. O'Toole," I said, "you stick tight here. I'm not going to be long."

I left the lights on and slipped through the door at the head of the stairs. From what I had seen of the basement I was pretty sure that I could find something down there to pry open that door.

The lights were on on the second floor and I went down the hall toward the stairs which led to the front part of the house. I hoped that Frankie and Meester John were still busy with their own troubles down there, but I had to make sure. I couldn't afford to get caught in the basement.

STILL voices were coming from the front room. They were arguing angrily and I could recognize Frankie's Groton-Harvard accent. There were other voices that I didn't recognize, but enough of them so that I guessed that most of the gang was still there in the front room. That suited me fine.

I was starting to go back down the hall to where the kitchen stairs were when a telephone jangled close at hand. It scared me out of a year's growth, and it was coming from the room where I had barged in on Sylvia earlier in the evening. I didn't want Meester John and any of his little playmates wandering around upstairs right now, so I pushed the door open and jumped for the bedside table where I remembered the phone to be.

I had it off the hook and the ringing stopped before I saw what I saw.

Sylvia Bendix was back in the bed where I had seen her first, but she wasn't as pretty now as she had been then. The negligee was twisted up above her knees and her mouth was open with a slack, unpleasant look. Automatically I had put the receiver to my ear.

"Hello," I said.

I kept looking at Sylvia and swearing to myself. She was dead, I thought. There was a big bruise on the side of her left temple and her hands had the relaxed, limp look that dead people's hands have at first.

"Hello—hello," a voice in the telephone kept saying. "Who is this?"

"Hello," I mumbled. "What do you want?"

"This is Bendix," the voice said angrily. "What are you doing in my wife's bedroom? Let me speak to her immediately!"

"Good glory, Handrahan, why do you have to get mixed up in things like this?" I thought crazily, and all the time I was standing there looking at Sylvia crumpled limply on the bed.

Finally it percolated through my thick skull that Bendix was somebody who could get the cops out here on the run, and I had a feeling that we needed cops in a big way right now.

"Look," I said, "never mind who I am right now. Your wife's been hurt and hurt bad. Can you hear me?"

"Yes," he said, and his voice quieted down a lot. I wondered about that. He didn't seem excited. "Get out here just as quick as you can and bring a doctor and the police with you. Bring Curt Whitson, too. Have you got it?"

He said he had, and the phone went dead at the other end. I was still standing there holding the receiver and looking at Sylvia when I heard the door open. It was Garcia—the bird with the mustache.

I was having a bad evening, and my reactions were faster than his. I dropped the receiver so that the phone wouldn't do any more ringing and got Slim's gun into my hand.

"Close the door, pally," I said, "and close it quietly or you won't ever close any more doors. I'm in a mood to let a little daylight into that fat tummy of yours."

I knew that I was taking a big chance, for I didn't really want to shoot him. If he ducked back through the door, I might chase him. It was a bad moment. I tried to force a murderous grin into my face.

CHAPTER VI

A Noble Effort

GARCIA'S eyes popped, but he closed the door and stood there looking at me. He was scared, and I knew I wasn't going to have any particular trouble with him. That made it his lucky day.

"Who did it?" I said, jerking my head toward the bed.

Garcia moved his lips but nothing came out. He was scared stiff. I went over to him and hit him twice across the face and he just stood there with his hands down while he took it. I knew I wasn't going to get anything out of him. He was in too much of a funk to talk. Then I remembered that he was some sort of a flunky of Meester John's and guessed that he might have the key to Jane's room on him.

"Put your hands on top of your head and play you're the Statue of Liberty, pally," I told him.

He didn't argue. I went through his pockets. There were keys there all right—a half dozen of them—and I figured that one ought to fit.

"I'd shoot you," I told him, "only it would make too much noise. So I guess I'll have to take you with me. And you'll be as quiet as a little mouse because if you're not I won't have to worry about making too much noise."

He blinked his eyes at me a couple of times so I hit him across the nose just for emphasis. I listened at the door for a minute but didn't hear anything, so I opened it and pushed Garcia out ahead of me.

My luck had run out.

Frankie was halfway up the staircase with a gun in his hand. Meester John was behind him with three or four more. Frankie grinned his teeth at me and swung up the gun.

He hadn't paid enough attention in his shooting classes at Groton-Harvard because he hit Garcia in the knee. Garcia howled like a wolf and was going down as I got my free hand in his collar and my knee into his rear. I gave him a boost and he went down the stairs, spread out like a fat frog, and he took Frankie and the rest with him.

They made a fine racket as they hit the bottom. I didn't wait to watch.

I got up the second flight of stairs in nothing flat and slammed the door shut at the

top. It was a good, stout door and that made me happy. I hoped that one of Garcia's keys would fit. One did.

I could hear a considerable uproar down below as I tried to find the key which would fit the door to Jane's room. My fingers were all thumbs and I dropped the keys twice.

"A fine hero you turned out to be, Handrahan," I thought. "It's probably because you got yourself stewed on all that water you drank."

Finally I found the right one.

I clicked on the light switch, feeling a little sick at what I might find. It was all right, though. Jane was sitting on a bed trussed neatly up to the headboard and with a towel stuffed into her mouth. She was wearing the blue suit with the white ruffle and seemed glad to see me.

"I'm sort of happy that you're not the bashful sort, Steve," she said, after I got the gag out.

I liked that. I liked it better when I got her loose and up on her feet and she gave me a kiss that made that brandy down in the kitchen seem tame. I would have liked to have stood around and continued the motion but it didn't seem like a good idea.

"Sis," I said, "you and I are still very much in the glue. In a couple of minutes or so, some assorted gorillas are going to come up here and chop the door down with axes. I think we'd better go."

"What do we do? Fly?"

"It would help," I told her gloomily.

The boys hadn't come up the stairs yet, but I could hear them talking on the floor below. There were two windows in the room and I went and looked out. The moon was almost down now but there was still enough light to see by. I didn't like what I saw much.

A gable jutted out some six or eight feet below the edge of the window. From there it was a goodish drop to the ground. I couldn't see, but I hoped that there were flower beds down there. The thought of jumping onto a concrete walk or into a gutter didn't appeal to me much.

I pushed the window up.

"Have you got strong ankles, Sis?" I asked.

"Strong enough," she said. "Maybe this will help."

SHE was pulling the sheets off the bed and tying them together. I thought that was a good idea and went across into the other two rooms and got more sheets. They made a fairish rope which would get us part way down, at least.

Frankie started hammering on the door out in the hall. I let him hammer until I got the rope tied to the bed and dropped the end out of the window.

"Out you go, kid," I said to Jane in a whisper. "When you hit the ground, start running. These birds aren't fooling."

"How about you?"

"Sweet," I said, "I lost my desire to be a hero when I was walking back out of Borneo. I'll be right behind you—and running."

I helped her over the sill and took time enough to think that she had the nicest legs I had ever seen. She smiled at me and started sliding. Then I went back to the hall door for a moment. Frankie was yelling and he sounded mad.

"Handrahan!"

"Yes sir?" I said.

"We've got you and the broad trapped. You ought to have sense enough to know that. Open up and we'll give you a break. We've got nothing against you."

"Sure. I got that idea when we were playing together down in the basement."

I was stalling for time because I didn't want Frankie and his little friends wandering around and looking out of windows while Jane was getting down. From where I stood I could see the rope of bed sheets jerking so that I knew she hadn't reached the ground yet.

"Okay, sharpie," Frankie said. "We'll chop the door down and then we'll work the both of you over."

"Don't scare me—I'm just a child," I lisped, being smart. I didn't feel that way. I was scared—good and scared—but I thought I might buy a little more time that way. I was wrong.

A big sliver split off the inside of the hall door and a bullet whacked into the wall too close to my head for comfort. The next bullet made a mess of the lock and I decided that it was time to get out of there. I slapped two bullets out if Slim's gun in the direction of the door just to give them something to think about and then locked the door of Jane's room. I had trouble with the key again.

I got through the window feet first and started down, but that sheet rope wasn't built

to hold a hundred and eighty pounds. My feet had just touched the gable when it let go.

I managed to get my hands on the slates but I couldn't hold myself and slid down and across the edge. The ground came up and hit me with a nasty jolt and then I was sitting there in a flower bed trying to shake the cobwebs out of my head.

"Steve—Steve!" a voice said. "Are you all right?"

I got my eyes back into focus and saw that it was Jane. She had hold of one of my arms and was trying to get me up. Up above I heard somebody yell as they found the rope of sheets.

"Listen," I mumbled, "I thought I told you to start running. Now scat."

"Come on, Steve! Hurry! They'll be down here any minute."

That made sense. I crawled around on my hands and knees until I found Slim's gun, then managed to get back on my feet. My right ankle hurt and my knees were wobbly, but I could stand. Jane got an arm around me.

"Let's go, soldier," she said.

There was a dark patch of shrubbery thirty or forty feet from the house and we made for that. The muscles in my back tickled with every step I took and I expected a bullet to slap me between the shoulder-blades. It didn't, but I called Jane names because she insisted on sticking with me instead of going on. That ankle wasn't much help in moving fast.

WE FINALLY made it, and I never knew before how nice shadows could be. I wanted to sit down and rest but Jane wouldn't let me.

"Come on, Steve. Please come on. It's just a little farther."

"What's just a little farther?" I said stupidly.

"A place where we can hide."

It seemed like a good idea. I couldn't see the house from where we were but I could hear voices, and again it didn't take any seventh son of a seventh son to guess that Frankie and Meester John wanted to see the two of us worse than ever by now.

It was pitch-dark under the trees but Jane seemed to know where she was going. Once I stumbled over one of the stone benches I had seen last night when we drove in. Jane reached a hand to me, though, and I didn't go down. My ankle hurt like sin but I thought that it wasn't quite so hard to use.

I was just figuring that we were going to make it when the headlights of a car stabbed into my eyes. I swore, and tried to get an arm up but there wasn't time enough. Something cracked me across the back of the neck and the headlights didn't bother me any more. As I went to sleep I thought that I heard Jane scream and I had the smell of lilac perfume in my nostrils again.

CHAPTER VI

Out Again

RIGHT back in the living room where Sylvia and I had been having our little tete-a-tete earlier in the evening was where I woke up. The place was more messed up now. All of the lights were on and I had a head that felt like a watermelon. A clock was striking somewhere and I counted the strokes to get my mind off my troubles.

According to the clock it was four in the morning.

I was sitting in an arm-chair and I wasn't tied. I could have got up and walked away except that I was wearing handcuffs and there was a beefy lad, who looked like a plainclothesman sitting across from me. He was chewing gum and smoking a cigar at the same time. I thought that was the heck of a note.

"Why don't you do one or the other?" I said.

He said, "Huh?" and looked at me as though I was something in a zoo.

"Either get rid of that cigar or spit the chewing gum out," I said. "And get these handcuffs off me! The smoothies you want are probably in Baltimore by now."

"Now, now, sonny," he said. "You just take it easy. Everything's going to be okay."

"It's going to be okay with me all right," I said nastily. "It's sure not going to be so okay with you as soon as I get hold of Curt Whitson."

"Never heard of him."

"You will."

The fat rowdy squinted at the end of his cigar and then knocked the ash off on the rug. I called him a couple of bad names and started to get up out of the chair, but he took a gun the size of a small cannon off his hip and pointed it at me.

I sat down again.

"Tch—tch!" he said. "I wouldn't want for you to strain yourself, sonny. Now, just as soon as the doc comes and has a look we'll take you down and lock you up all regular. If the little lady's dead you'll fry. If she ain't dead maybe you'll get off with twenty years. Anyway, you ain't got a thing to worry yourself about."

I felt sick at my stomach all at once. The lilac smell was back in my nostrils and I remembered how I had thought that I had heard Jane scream.

"Where is she?" I said. I was working my hands around and trying to slip them out of the handcuffs but not having much luck at it. "If you and your hoodlums sapped her the same as you sapped me I'll see that you're put away where you won't hear the dogs bark for the next hundred years!"

The fat dick blinked and his eyes were honestly puzzled. He chewed his gum for a minute and looked at me. I wasn't getting to first base with those handcuffs.

"Now, sonny," he said then, "you know we wouldn't sap the little lady. We found her right upstairs there on the bed where you left her."

I really felt sick then. Things had been happening fast lately and I had forgotten all about what had happened to Sylvia. At the back of my mind I got a sudden idea that things could look pretty bad for Steve Handrahan unless he did some fancy explaining.

"Yeah," the fat lad went on piously. "Open and shut case, sonny. Mr. Bendix gets a phone call that his wife's been hurt. He comes by the station and picks I and Joe up. We come out here and find you running around through the woods with a gun in your hand. Then we find his missis up there in the bedroom."

He put a fresh piece of gum in his mouth.

"And not only that, sonny, Mr. Bendix identifies you as the egg who came out here to hide from the Washington cops in the first place. Open and shut case all right."

I began to breathe again, but not too good.

"Is Bendix up there?" I said, jerking my head toward the stairs.

"*Mister* Bendix, to you, sonny," he said, scowling. "Sure, he's up there. Where'd you think he'd be?"

I figured that things had got all messed up somehow but that if Bendix was here Curt probably wasn't far away. Curt would get things straightened out. Then I could go back to the house on Massachusetts Avenue and have a big drink—or maybe two big drinks—and go to bed. After that maybe I'd go back to Borneo. Things were simpler back there.

"Tell Bendix I want to see him," I said. "And where's Curt?"

"Curt who, sonny?"

"Curt Whitson," I told him, and began to get mad all over again. "You tell him I want to see him in a hurry because I'm good and tired of playing cops and robbers with his no-good friends."

The cop scowled at me some more.

"Look, sonny, I don't know no Curt Whitson. I don't want to know no Curt Whitson. And if I was you, I wouldn't do no more talking until I had a lawyer."

I DIDN'T get it, so I called him a fat baboon and went right on talking.

"Where's Jane? The girl that was with me out there in the woods?"

He put his cigar back in his face and stared at me belligerently. My dislike for fat detectives in civilian clothes was becoming almost homicidal. I was just starting to get up out of my chair and start for him again when I heard somebody coming down the stairs. It was Joseph P. Bendix. I was sorry that I hadn't liked him when I had met him at Curt's house, and had thought that he probably made passes at his stenographers. Right now he looked like money from home to me. There was a lean, sad-looking bird with him that I took to be another plainclothes cop.

"Am I glad to see you, Bendix!" I said. "Tell this rummy who I am, and to take these handcuffs off."

Bendix didn't say anything. He looked at me. Not a friendly look.

Then he came across the floor and stood right in front of me and looked some more. I looked back. He kept his hands in the side pockets of his coat and there was something queer about his eyes that I didn't like. I had a feeling all of a sudden that I ought to know the answer to something.

I got it, then.

It's funny the things you think of when you know you're probably going to die in the next few seconds. It had been that way when the Japs had shot the wing off my B-24 over Borneo. I had remembered that I owed Brick Shiller thirteen dollars and eighty cents for gin rummy and that, when I was

twelve, I used to buy chocolate sodas for a little girl who lived on Idaho Avenue. Her name was Marilyn O'Daniel. Silly things like that.

"Handrahan," Bendix said, "you killed my wife. You lured her out here, and killed her."

I sat there and watched his hands and thought of a lot of things while the pieces of the puzzle fitted themselves together. I knew it had to be that way. The thing just wouldn't add up any other way.

I thought I might as well say it. It wouldn't make things any worse because they couldn't get any worse. Besides, it would be a nice line to go out on.

"A clever bit of work, pally," I said. "Take these cuffs off and I'll clap my hands."

I guessed that he would grandstand a little more. He did. The two cops were too dumb to see what was coming off. He had probably picked them for that reason.

"I'm going to give you what you deserve, Handrahan," he said. "I'm going to shoot you down like the dog you are!"

I sneered at him and wondered whether or not I could hit him enough above the knees to spoil his aim.

"Corny," I said. "Corny even in a third-rate burlesque."

I was afraid that he would shoot from his pocket but he didn't. That would have spoiled his grandstand. Instead, he pulled the gun out of his pocket and that gave me a fraction of a chance. As I dived at his legs I caught a glimpse of the fat baboon sitting with his mouth open. The cigar had fallen out of it.

The bullet chipped my cheek—not enough to do real damage. Bendix fell on me and then the two of us were rolling around on the floor all tangled up together. The gun went off in my ear again but I didn't feel anything. The handcuffs weren't much of a help to me. The odds were too long.

"Handrahan, you're a gone goose this time," I thought, and butted up with my head.

It was one of those thousand-to-one shots that come through once in a while. It caught Bendix under the chin and laid him out colder than a boat-load of codfish.

I managed to get up on my knees before the two cops closed in on me. They flattened me again and were beating my head up and down on the floor when men came in through the french windows. Other men came in through the door and I heard Curt's voice.

"What the devil's going on here?" he said.

It was too much for me. I passed out. . . .

BUD MATHER brought me to by holding a glass of brandy under my nose. I drank it and told Bud that he was a stingy old woman and to get me another and bring one for Mr. O'Toole at the same time. Bud did.

"Why can't you ever stay out of trouble?" Bud said.

I scowled at him and moved my head back and forth to see if my neck was still on. I didn't have the handcuffs any longer. There were F.B.I. men all over the house so I drank my brandy and began to feel better. Bud hovered around me like an old hen.

"You took your own time about getting here," I grumbled. "It's a fine business that I have to fight the war for you for three years out in the Pacific and then come back here and fight. And all by myself, too."

Bud looked unhappy.

"We got our signals crossed. We were gathering the rest of the party in in a little trap we had set down the road. We didn't figure on you coming back here and rowing with the local cops."

"I didn't row with them. They rowed with me. Where's Curt?"

"Upstairs," Bud said. "There's one of your little pals up there with a bullet in his leg."

"Good. That's Garcia. I hope he's dead."

"He's not," Bud said. "Neither is the blonde."

That made me think of something and I sat up, spilling what was left of my brandy. "Where's Jane?" I said. "She's with you, isn't she?"

Bud Mather looked funny.

"We haven't seen her, Steve."

The bottom fell out of my stomach. I got up out of my chair, almost fell on my face and then got my legs back under me. The room went around and around for a minute and then I was yelling at Bud like I was crazy.

"Where's Bendix? Blast you, where's Bendix?"

Bud thought I was crazy, too. Then Curt Whitson came down the stairs, an F.B.I. man with him. I wobbled across the room toward them.

"Listen here Curt!" I said. "Where's Bendix?"

Curt looked at me, squinting a little. "You gave him a bad cut in the chin. One of the

local officers took him to the hospital. He'll be all right."

"All right, your grandmother!" I yelled. "That's the sharpie you're looking for! You'll find your local cop dumped out at the side of the road some place and walking home. And it's ten to one that Bendix has got Jane with him!"

Curt was stopped for once in his life. If I hadn't been so scared and mad I would have enjoyed it. His mouth didn't exactly drop open but it did the next thing to it.

"Steve," he said, "you're crazy. You've had a hard night. What you need is a drink."

"Curse it, I don't need a drink! Don't stand around here with your finger in your mouth. He's got that girl and if we don't move in one blazing hurry it's going to be too late. You want to know why? Because she's the only one who can tie him into the dirty business he's been fronting for right before your eyes!"

Curt's not the sort who takes a long time to make up his mind. He swung around to the man with him.

"Get three or four of your men, Tom," he said in a tight voice. "I've never known Steve to go off the deep end yet."

"He's got a cabin cruiser tied up in a little cove down on the Potomac," I said, more quietly. "It's a thousand to one shot that he's heading for there."

"There are a hundred coves in the Potomac, Steve," Curt said.

"I think I know a gee who can take us to the right one," I said grimly.

CHAPTER VIII

"Here We Go Again!"

THE rest of them followed me as I went toward the back of the house and through the kitchen. The ham was still there and so was the brandy. Down in the basement the yellow light was still on. I told one of the F.B.I. men to bring an axe with him and we went on down the little passage to where I had left Slim. The door was locked so we chopped it down.

Slim was where I had left him, trussed up like a turkey in Curt's Christmas tie. He didn't look any prettier than he had when I left him. I jerked him up onto his feet and asked him if he remembered me. He did. After that he wasn't hard to handle.

He knew where the cove was, he said.

It was beginning to get gray out under the trees as we piled into three cars. Curt, Tom, Bud Mather and I rode in the first one, taking Slim with us. Tom drove. We started with a jerk and went down the driveway, missing trees by inches, as we skidded out into the highway. Tom put his foot down on the floor board and held it there. The needle climbed past sixty and it seemed to me that we were crawling.

Curt and I talked in snatches, yelling to make ourselves heard. I told him about the pieces of the puzzle which had fitted themselves together back there in the living room.

"Jane got the dope on Bendix in New York," I said. "I don't know how, but Bendix found out. He couldn't afford to let her get back to you with it. So he had her snatched."

"That's good enough to get him forty years," Tom said, back over his shoulder.

He missed a vegetable truck on its way to early market. Missed it by about the thickness of the paint on our car, I thought. We got our wheels out of the ditch again and went on. Slim was hunched down in the front seat and didn't look happy. Bud Mather reached forward and straightened him up.

"Keep your eyes on where you're going," Bud said. "If we should happen to take the wrong turn it'll be too awful bad for you."

I went on with my story.

"A bird named Ray St. John was to do the snatching, which he did. Also he beat me over the ears. He was to bring Jane out to Bendix's place in Virginia and then call Bendix. Sylvia Bendix spoiled that by coming back from New York when she wasn't supposed to. Meester John was there when she arrived, but he managed to smuggle Jane upstairs and he and the rest of his little pals laid low. Sylvia went to bed. She wasn't in on the black market racket."

We went around a bend on two wheels and then turned into a dirt side road. Tom didn't slow up. After I got back out of Curt's lap I went on again.

"Then I barged in. Meester John must have thought he was running a hotel. When he came in and saw me bussing Sylvia he must have lost his temper. Anyway, he and his boys worked me over and locked me up. They used the same room where we found Slim."

"It was a dirty trick to send you out there, Steve, without any warning," Curt said, sort of apologetically. "It was the only way I could bust something loose, though."

"I thought I was telling this."

"I'll fill in a gap or two. We had pretty good information that the gang was using the Bendix place as headquarters. That note of Jane's confirmed it. We didn't suspect Bendix. We thought that his caretaker was the head man. He's a smooth customer who goes by the name of Frank Mallon."

"I've met Frankie," I said sourly. "I got good and sick of him, too."

"We picked him up," Tom said, yelling back over his shoulder again. "You won't be seeing him around for quite a while."

"That's too soon," I told him.

"I didn't tell Bendix of my suspicions," Curt went on. "But when I heard about your taxi driver being murdered it gave me the chance I'd been looking for. It was a legitimate excuse to get you out there and into the house. I figured that you'd do the rest."

"You're real careless with my time," I said. "To say nothing of my health and good looks."

Then I thought of Jane and hoped hard that my going out there last night was going to do her some good now. I was having a tough time forgetting that lilac perfume somehow. Also the nice feeling it had been back in the taxi when she had sat on my lap—even if a wreck had been responsible.

THE road got bumpier and went down steeply toward the river. It was almost full daylight now. There wasn't any sign of a cove yet and I decided that if Slim had been lying I would finish up the job which I had started back there in the basement.

"That's my two-bits' worth," Curt said. "Take it on from there."

"It was little Sylvia who gummed the thing up," I told him. "Meester John had begun to get jumpy because things weren't working out according to schedule. So he decided the devil with Sylvia and he would call Bendix and tell him to come out anyway. Sylvia didn't want him to. She was planning to run away with Meester John and live happily ever after, and she figured her husband wouldn't like it. She and Meester John and Frankie all tangled and Frankie either shot her or slugged her. I don't know which."

"Both," Tom said tersely.

"Bendix suspected something, so he called back. I answered the phone and he recognized my voice. He guessed that something had gone wrong but saw a chance to turn it to his advantage. So he picked up a couple of cops he knew were dumb enough for his purpose and came on out. It worked slick. They caught me running around in the woods with a gun in my hand and wanted for murder over in the District. Bendix's wife was upstairs murdered. The stage was all set for the old unwritten law act. And it blame near worked, too."

"He'd never have got away with it, Steve," Bud Mather said. "I'd have got him if I had to chase him around the world and it took me the rest of my life."

"A fat lot of good that would have done me," I told him sourly. I leaned forward and got my fingers hooked into Slim's collar. "Say you, where's that cove?"

"It ain't far," he mumbled. "A couple of miles. I swear it ain't far."

Then I snarled at Tom, nerves eating me up:

"Can't you get a little speed out of this bucket? What are we parking for? With the start you chuckle-heads gave him, Bendix is probably ten miles down the river by now!"

Curt got me by the arm and pulled me back into the seat.

"Take it easy, Steve," he said quietly. "If Bendix is there we'll get him. How did he get hold of Jane?"

"Probably grabbed her in the dark while his stooges were beating me over the ears. Or maybe that weasel-faced chauffeur of his did it. How do I know? I'm not a seventh son."

"You've done a pretty fair job of guessing so far."

"Mr. O'Toole told me," I growled. "That's what I keep him for. If Bendix isn't down there, then I'm wrong. If he is, then you won't have to worry whether my guessing was any good or not."

We swung around a little bend and then Tom said, "Oh-oh!" and jammed on the brakes. I tried to crawl up into the front seat with him and Slim.

There was a little clearing about a hundred yards long. At the end of it there was a rickety pier with a cabin cruiser tied up

there. A man was on the pier fussing with a mooring line.

I don't remember how I got out of the car, but I did. I didn't even know that I had an ankle as I went across the clearing. Maybe I didn't—just wings. Bud Mather, for all of his two hundred and fifteen pounds, came along right behind.

The man on the pier was Bendix's sneaky-looking chauffeur. We were halfway down the slope when he saw us. He yelled something, got the rope loose finally and jumped down into the cruiser's cockpit. The engine was already turning over slowly.

I was still twenty yards away and I yelled something silly like "Stop, thief!" or "Come back here, you!"

He didn't and then I saw Bendix straighten up out of the cockpit with a shotgun in his hands. It seemed to me that I was just running in place. My feet were going to beat Paavo Nurmi but they weren't taking me anywhere. Behind me somebody was doing a lot of shooting.

The cruiser's engine roared as the chauffeur gave her the gun but she was big and heavy and she didn't move fast. Fast enough, though, so that she was a good six feet out when I got to the end of the pier. I kept right on running. So did Bud Mather.

It seemed like I was up there in the air for a long time. I saw Bendix swing the shotgun around and the holes in the end of it looked like twin Holland tunnels.

BENDIX had a big patch of adhesive tape across his chin, and that made me feel good. I wondered if that Jap slug in my shoulder-blade was going to be happy when he got a lot of buckshot moved in with him for neighbors.

The gun went off right in my face. Bendix was at the foot of the class as a shot. He must have gone to the same school that Groton-Harvard had. I landed right on top of him, all spraddled out.

I had had a lot of trouble tonight and I took it all out on him. I kicked him in the stomach with my knee, slugged him on the chin, hammered his head against the rail, and was trying to bite him when Tom and Curt jumped on board. Bud Mather had taken care of the chauffeur.

We found Jane down in the cabin. She wasn't hurt, but was tied up good and tight. I thought that she looked awful pretty sitting there in her blue suit, even if it was wrinkled.

"You seem to make a habit of getting tied up," I growled at her. "I'm going to take you home where I can keep an eye on you."

She had courage enough to grin at me.

"I don't know whether or not I could trust myself with a rowdy like you. Could I?"

"No," I said.

"Okay, Steve," she said. "Take me home."

A couple of days later Jane and I went down to see Sylvia in the hospital. She was sitting up and wearing something filmy that didn't cover too much. We talked for a while and then she said that she was going out to the Coast to live. She gave me the old eye and added that if I was ever out that way I must be sure to drop in and see her.

"Hold your hats, boys," I mumbled. "Here we go again."

Jane took me by the arm and led me gently but firmly out.

"Hold your hats, boys, period!" she said.

Mr. O'Toole stood there and sneered at me but I sneered right back at him. I felt swell all at once. I have always liked lilac perfume.

Tired Kidneys Often Bring Sleepless Nights

Doctors say your kidneys contain 15 miles of tiny tubes or filters which help to purify the blood and keep you healthy. When they get tired and don't work right in the daytime, many people have to get up nights. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder. Don't neglect this condition and lose valuable, restful sleep.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may also cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, a stimulant diuretic, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. Doan's give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills. *(Adv.)*

Beppo tumbled back and reached for the hammer

MURDER COMES IN THREES

By H. C. BUTLER

When animal trainer Jerry Blade loses his life, it's just the beginning of a grim reign of terror under the Big Top!

IT WAS a crazy case right from the start. It began in a cage full of wild animals and ended on top of a fifty-foot pole. That gives you an idea how nutty it was.

Me, I'm publicity man for the Burns Three-Ring Circus. It's my job to see that the show gets advance billing, and that the top acts catch the public's fancy. We have three big acts around which we've built a pretty good show.

One is Jerry Blade's mixed tiger and lion act, another is the Great Waldo who does things that aren't possible on the high wire, and the last is Val Jenis, a lad who does all kinds of meandering on top of a fifty-foot, swaying pole. The rest is routine, but good.

Like I say, it started in a cage of cats. I was watching Jerry Blade put his snarling charges through their routine, with my heart bouncing around in my mouth like it always does. To me, there's something hair-raising about a man surrounded by jungle cats. I get as nervous as a bride—maybe because of what Jerry told me once, in confidence.

"There's one thing to always remember," he had said. "Never fall down in a cage of cats. They're used to seeing man upright and in authority. A reclining man looks helpless to them, and it's their nature to maul the helpless. If you fall in the big cage, start counting your minutes."

Well, Jerry was young—twenty-eight to be exact—and as sure-footed as the cats themselves. But at the end of his act, when he had the cats all perched on their pedestals, he had a habit of leaping to the top of a stool and posing dramatically with his bull whip high in the air. It wasn't much of a stunt, really, but I kept thinking, what if he should slip—

Well, he finally did.

We were doing the matinee, and Jerry's cats had gone through their routine without too much back talk. Finally he got them all up on their mounts, and as the windjammers gave him a roll on the drums, Jerry leaped to the stool. What happened then I never want to see again.

His shining boot hit the top of the stool—then slipped from under him. With a thump he went down on his back in the sawdust. He rolled over quickly and started to get up. But the cat nearest him—a huge lion that had once killed a trainer—acted with an instinct that was both quick and devastating.

In a flash his great jaws closed around Jerry's head, and was dragging him along the ground. Tigers won't mix in a thing like that, but lions will. It wasn't long before all the other lions were in on the kill.

WE FINALLY managed to drive the beasts off by sticking the feeding forks through the cage. But when we pulled Jerry's body out, he was dead. What had once been a handsome young head was now a crushed, bloody pulp.

I swallowed the lump in my throat as a couple of roustabouts carried Jerry to his tent. As we left the Big Top the band struck up a fast, furious number, and the clowns went on to ease the tension in the crowd. The show, of course, had to go on.

We collected quite a following on the way to Jerry's tent. Val Janis, the pole man, Waldo, the high wire artist, and Beppo, the clown. Beppo was all made up for his act, which would go on in a few minutes.

His face was done in clown-white, with his thick lips done in heavy black. The black lips, turned down at the ends, gave him the lugubrious expression which had made him famous. But right now he didn't need the white stuff to make him sad. He'd been a good friend of Jerry's and I could see he was badly shaken.

"It's terrible," he kept saying. "Terrible."

Val Janis, a thin, wiry man with dark hair and a trim mustache, said:

"I'll take my fifty foot pole to a cageful of lions any day."

Waldo, the high-wire performer, nodded a thick, bullet-like head and hunched his broad shoulders.

"Cats are funny," he said. "You never know what they'll do."

With me, all this went in one ear and out the other—but not for the reason you think. It was just that I couldn't think of anything except that Jerry Blade, who had been so alive a moment ago, was dead.

Then, something about Beppo caught my attention. It was difficult to say what his expression was under his ludicrous make-up, but I thought I saw a sudden, unreasonable terror there.

"This is just the beginning," he said in a voice that sounded like doom. "It always happens in threes."

That snapped my head up, but quick. Threes! That was the old circus superstition. But everything happened in threes. Everyone knew that. When tragedy once struck the circus, the superstition said it would strike twice more.

I call it superstition. I guess that's the word for it, but sometimes I wonder if there isn't more to it than that. With circus folk, it's more than a superstition. It's a deadly fear. A dreaded reality.

After Jerry's accident, you could almost predict what would happen. Jack Jay, Blade's assistant, would have to work the cats in the next show. He'd be thinking of what happened to Jerry. Maybe he'd slip somewhere, make the wrong move at the wrong time.

Or maybe Waldo on the high wire, whose very life depended on his mental and physical alertness, might get jittery, make a misstep. Or Janis on the pole, wondering if he would be the next in the series of threes, might overbalance himself, do just one thing wrong. That's the way it happened in circuses. After one accident, you could expect a series of them, until the jinx was off.

I decided to try and snap the boys out of it.

"Look, fellows, forget this silly three business. Go out there and do your acts. You'll

get through all right. There doesn't *have* to be three."

My words must have sounded hollow, unconvincing to them. Beppo shook his head slowly.

"There'll be two more," he said dismally, and walked out.

I watched him go, thinking what a grand trouper he was. In a moment he'd be out there making the kids in the audience howl with laughter. And he'd be trying to forget Jerry Blade and the grief that tugged at his heart.

I looked back at Blade again. At the crushed head, the uniform which the cats had clawed to ribbons. Only his shiny, black boots were untouched. Only the black boots which, in a way, had caused his death. Only the boots. . . .

My heart did a sudden flipflop and dropped into the pit of my stomach. The boots! I knelt down, looked at them closely. I ran my finger along the sole of one of the boots, gathered a white substance under my fingernail. The blood went out of my face, leaving me cold, clammy.

"What's the matter, Ken?" Waldo said.

I stared at him a long time, and tried to grasp the significance of what I'd found.

"Jerry—didn't have an accident," I managed to say.

Everyone looked at me then, as though I'd lost my mind. I had to tell it to them straight, to make them understand.

"He was murdered!" I said.

One of the girls in the crowd, a trapeze performer, muffled a little cry. Janis fingered his tiny mustache nervously. Waldo's stocky body seemed to pull together into a tight ball.

I pointed at Jerry's boots.

"The soles of his boots are—are *waxed!*"

"Waxed!"

I nodded. It was all as plain as the nose on Durante's face. Hideously, fantastically plain.

"Somebody murdered Jerry Blade," I repeated. "Somebody put wax on the soles of his boots, hoping he'd slip in the cage. If he hadn't, they'd have tried it again—tried it until he did slip."

I saw wild, incredulous expressions around me. I saw Waldo stoop down to look at the boots.

"That means—" he began, and broke off lamely.

"That means there's a murderer among us," I said. "A murderer who knows something about cats."

I LEFT Jerry's body in the care of a couple of razorbacks and headed for the boss's tent. The boss, Myron Burns was the owner of the show. He was thin, middle-aged, with a tan, weather-creased face—an easy-going, phlegmatic sort of man who never got excited about anything.

He'd been in the circus business so long—as a tight rope walker in the early days—that he had sawdust in his blood. That's the way you get. Once you've lived with a circus, you can't live any other way.

He was sitting behind a small desk with Brick Redmond, the business manager, when I entered. Redmond was called Brick because his complexion matched the side of a brick house. High blood pressure caused his redness, and also caused his nervous, jittery disposition. He hadn't been with the show very long—about two years—so he didn't have as much sawdust in his veins as the rest of us.

Both men looked at me sharply as I came in, and from the sour expressions on their mugs I knew they'd already heard about Jerry.

"You heard about it, eh?" I said, just to make sure.

They nodded in unison. Burns' thin lips moved slightly as he shook his head dolefully.

"Darn shame. A good trouper, going like that."

I nodded. Redmond shifted nervously in his chair. His feet scraped the wood floor of the tent.

"Accidents will happen," he said, trying to be fatalistic about it.

I just stared at him. Then I looked at Burns. It would be tough telling them, but it had to be done.

"It wasn't an accident."

Burns' gray eyebrows arched in surprise. Redmond's crimson face wore a puzzled scowl. Burns found his voice first.

"What do you mean, Ken?"

"It was murder," I told them.

"Murder!"

"Yes—deliberate and premeditated." Then I told them how someone had waxed Jerry's boots.

It was like dropping a blockbuster in their laps. It shattered even Burns' lackadaisical demeanor. Redmond started to fidget like an old woman with the palsy. Then Burns asked me if I was sure. I told him I was. He looked at me as though he still couldn't believe it.

"But who would want to kill Jerry?" he asked.

He should ask me! I shrugged.

"No fair starting with the sixty-four-dollar question. Let's begin with the two-dollar one. Did he have any enemies that you know of?"

Burns wagged his head. The creases in his thick skin seemed to have grown deeper since I'd spilled the news.

"He was popular with all the kinkers," he said.

Redmond suddenly jerked up his head. That's the way he did things—in jerks. You could see he'd been smitten by a sudden inspiration, the way he acted.

"Maybe the motive was jealousy. Jack Jay's been hanging around a long time, wanting to work the cats."

When he said it that way, it made me want to sock him. Jack Jay was a good boy. Every kinker—performer—in the show liked him. True, he'd been understudying Jerry a long time, and I guess he did want a chance to handle the cats, but so what? He didn't want it bad enough to commit murder.

"It doesn't sound right," I said. "Jack wouldn't kill Jerry for a chance at the animal act. You know that, Brick."

Redmond shrugged broad shoulders, said it was just an idea and for me not to get sore about it. Burns' wrinkled face took on a troubled look.

"It'll be tough on the kinkers," he said. "You know what they'll be thinking."

I knew what he meant. Burns was an old trouper himself, and he was thinking how tragedy always hits the circus in threes. Not that he was superstitious. It was just in his blood, like the sawdust was.

"They're thinking it already, I said. "The jinx is on."

Burns' tan face went a little white.

"You know what that means, Ken. It means there *will* be two more tragedies."

REDMOND drummed nervously on the desk with his fingers, his red face agitated.

"Nonsense!" he blurted, as though trying to bolster his own lack of conviction. "Most stupid thing I ever heard. No reason at all to expect two more accidents. Besides," he smiled contemptuously, "there'd only be one more anyway. Jerry's mishap is really the second. You seem to forget that Mike Lazotti died a month ago."

Burns gave him a quick glance.

"Mike was just a roustabout, not a performer. Roustabouts are always getting into scraps, and Lazotti took a beating that killed him. But his death wasn't a major tragedy, like Jerry's. The kinkers will figure Jerry's death is the first one—with two more coming. And they *will* come, Brick, they always do."

Right then, I got sore. I gave Burns a good going over about being too superstitious. But it was an act. Deep down, I knew how serious it was. I'd seen shows actually break up, when the jinx was on. The kinkers would get jittery, everyone thinking he was going to be next.

There'd be more accidents. They'd miss cues, gum up the acts. The show would fall apart. It had happened before. It could happen again.

Anyway, I walked out of the office, acting like I was plenty burned up, hoping to snap them out of it. When I got outside I ran into Waldo. He stopped me.

"Listen, Ken," he said. "If anything should happen to me on the wire tonight—" He stopped, stared at me helplessly.

This looked like it. The show was going to blazes. Waldo was trying to edge out of the act.

"Okay, Waldo," I said. "If you're jittery, don't go up tonight. We can fill it in with something else."

I wasn't being sarcastic. I meant it. There's no point in making a man go through a dangerous act if he's on edge. But I found out I had Waldo all wrong.

"I'm not quitting," he snapped, and his voice was angry. "I've been a trouper too long to walk out on an act. I'm going up tonight. But I want you to know that if somethnig *does* happen to me, it'll be murder again—not an accident."

And he left it that way. He wouldn't say another word.

By the time the evening performance went on, the cops had been called in on the case and were doing some fancy snooping around. But it all added up to zero. They couldn't figure out any more angles than we could. Jerry Blade had been killed by person or persons unknown, and that was the end of it.

Myron Burns, Brick Redmond and I decided to view the evening show from a box seat, opposite the cat cage. As a prelude to the start of the show proper, a few clowns were slapsticking it for the amusement of

the kids in the audience, and some of the grown-ups too.

Beppo, with his white and black make-up, was one of them. After a few minutes, he paused in his clowning and came over to our box. His sober make-up, plus the fact that Jerry's death had got him down anyway, made him a sorry looking spectacle.

He stood there a minute, saying nothing, then finally dropped words out of the corner of his painted mouth.

"It's a death show tonight," he said. "It's in the air."

I felt like slugging him. He wasn't doing anybody any good, making such remarks. Yet, I couldn't blame him. It was traditional —this business of threes.

"Take it easy, Beppo," I said. "Everything'll be all right."

He shook his head doubtfully and went back to his clowning. A few minutes later the show started. There was the usual parade around the track—a very colorful affair—and then came the first ring act. Jack Jay and the cats.

I'll be honest with you. I was plenty nervous during the animal act. I was sitting on a pin-cushion, just waiting for one of those cats to knock Jay for a loop. But, thank heaven, it didn't happen. Jay handled the act like a veteran, although I did notice the cats were a little noisier than usual. I breathed for the first time when it was over.

There was a lot of routine stuff then—tumblers, equestrians, the elephant act, jugglers, and the like. Then, about halfway through the show, came Val Janis on the swaying pole.

It was really a lulu of an act. The wiry Janis, on top of the fifty-foot pole, would do hand-stands, head-stands, and a lot of assorted acrobatics, while the pole swayed gently back and forth from the movement of his body. During this time, the wind-jammers played "Don't Fence Me In", which is a heck of a number for a lad with as much space around him as Janis has on the pole. But that was the idea. Grim humor.

As a closing sequence, he'd put on a stunt that would keep the audience in a nervous sweat until it was over. Beppo, the clown, would stand at the foot of the pole. Janis, on top, would do a head stand. Then Beppo —or so it looked to the spectators—would start pushing and pulling the pole, causing it to sway wildly.

Actually, Beppo didn't do a thing, although he put on a good act of make-believe. The sway of the pole was controlled by Janis, himself, who knew just how far he could go without falling off and breaking his neck.

It was a nerve-wracking act, at any time, but with the jinx on, it just about knocked us all out. I felt a lot better when Janis hit the sawdust, safely.

Some more routine stuff followed—trained seals, clowns, dog acts, trapeze performers. Then the finale. The Great Waldo on the high wire.

WALDO was the only tight-wire performer we had, and he was plenty good. He went through his act on a wire about forty feet from the sawdust, and without a net. He could do more stunts on that wire than I could do on a sidewalk. But, like Janis, it was his closing stunt that caused general heart failure in the audience.

Waldo was the only high-wire performer I've ever known who had so perfected the frontward flip that he could do it without a net.

He'd get himself braced, balanced just right, and then, very suddenly, he'd do a somersault in the air—coming down on his feet on the high wire. No matter how you looked at it, I always figured it was a tough way to make a living. One slip—and curtains.

Well, this night he was all ready to do the flip. The P.A. system had requested the audience to remain quiet until Waldo had completed the act in safety. He stood there, high above the ring, balancing himself perfectly in the center of the almost invisible wire. An expectant hush lay over the vast throng of people; the Big Top was as silent as though it was empty.

Then, very quickly, he did the flip.

He came down on the wire all right, with both feet perfectly balanced. I breathed a sigh of relief. Then I heard a *ping*—and Waldo was falling through space! The crowd, stunned, watched him hit the sawdust, bounce, roll over. As somebody screamed, the crowd roared to its feet, and the place was a madhouse.

It all happened so suddenly that we were glued to our seats for a moment. Then I leaped over the rail of the box, with Burns and Brick Redmond after me.

By the time I reached Waldo, a razorback and a clown were bending over the crumpled, broken form that had once been

the Great Waldo. I felt ants crawling along my scalp and down my spine as I looked at him.

The Great Waldo had done his last act.

I glanced up at the wire and saw why Waldo had fallen. The wire had snapped, near the center. It had apparently been able to withstand Waldo's other tricks, but the jarring force with which he'd come down on the wire after his flip had been too much.

Tensely, I watched them carry Waldo's body from the Big Top. I saw Burns' face, wrinkled in an agony of horror. Redmond's red face twisted as though in pain. Then, the black and white face of Beppo, the clown.

I heard something rattle in Beppo's throat, like he was trying to say something and couldn't. Finally, words tumbled out.

"This is the second," he said dully. "There'll be another. Death comes in threes."

I decided to ignore him. I looked up at the wire again, then at Burns.

"Have somebody bring that wire into the office," I said. "I'll bet money somebody cut it part way to weaken it." I turned to Beppo. "Maybe you ought to change the way you say that. Maybe it's murder that comes in threes."

A few minutes later we were back in Burns' office. Redmond was pacing the floor like a lion in a cage. Burns was silent, his face a sort of ash gray. For a long time, nobody said anything. Then Burns broke the silence.

"Look here, Ken," he said. "I want to tell you something—before I tell the cops."

"Shoot," I said, not knowing what to expect.

Burns lit a cigarette.

"When Jerry Blade was killed, I thought it was the work of some one who had a personal grudge against Blade. Now that Waldo's gone too, I'm beginning to think something else. I think somebody's trying to sabotage the circus!"

"Sabotage, eh?"

Burns nodded.

"Somebody's trying to wreck the show. I'm convinced of it."

I thought it over a minute. It sounded logical enough. In two successive performances, we'd lost two of our key acts. It certainly looked like somebody wanted to do the show harm.

"Who'd want to pull a stunt like that?" I asked, wondering if Burns had any ideas.

He shrugged.

"I'm not sure. But I have an idea."

"Let's have it."

Burns settled back in his chair. Redmond stopped pacing the floor, stood tensely still.

"I may be all wrong," Burns said, "but at least it's something to work on. It goes back twenty years, to a small town in the South. I was engaged to be married to a nice kid, but there was another man in town who couldn't see it our way.

"He was tough—plenty. One day, in a jealous fit, he murdered that girl. The cops couldn't prove a thing, and it looked for a time like he'd get off scot free. But I managed to dig up enough evidence to convict him. His name was Ed Morgan. He was sent up for life."

I DIDN'T say anything, just let him go on.

"You know how those life terms are," he said. "He was released a couple months ago after serving twenty years. He'd threatened me when they jailed him, said if he ever got out he'd get revenge. And now he's out."

I looked Burns over. I was beginning to get a glimpse of what he was leading up to, but I didn't quite see it yet. I told him to go on.

"Of course, I haven't any proof," Burns continued. "But I'm wondering if Morgan has set out on a plan to sabotage the circus, take away its top acts, and ruin me financially."

"If he's so hot after you, why doesn't he just knock you off, instead of these others?" I asked.

A crooked smile twisted Burns' fine lips.

"He might do that eventually. But it would be like him to try to ruin me financially first—make me suffer awhile before finishing me."

"Would you recognize this Morgan?"

"I don't know, Ken." Burns' face clouded. "He was thirty when he went to jail. He'd be fifty now. If he grew a mustache to change his appearance—something like that—I probably wouldn't know him."

"So that he might be employed with the circus right now, as a roustabout?"

"That's what I was thinking," Burns said.

I wasn't too enthusiastic about the idea. But I acknowledged it was something to work on.

Just then Beppo came in, dragging the wire which had been taken from Waldo's act. He showed me the severed ends, where they'd snapped apart. I couldn't be positive,

but it looked to me like they might have been cut part way through, and had snapped the rest of the way.

"It always comes up murder," I said, and walked out.

That night I got very little sleep. There were too many wild thoughts fighting for dominance in my brain. I kept thinking about Jerry and the lions. About Waldo, hurtling to his death from the high wire. About Beppo and his continued references to tragedy coming in threes. About Burns' story of Ed Morgan, who might be behind a plot to wreck the show.

Then I thought of Val Janis. The only top performer left. His swaying pole act was the only drawing card on the bill. If there was a plot to wreck the show—if this plot did take the form of repeating itself in threes—then Janis would be the next logical victim!

I decided to have a talk with Janis in the morning, tell him he didn't have to do the pole act for awhile—in fact, urge him not to.

It was about three in the morning that I got up, slipped on shoes and trousers, and went for a stroll around the lot. The night was sticky hot, and I had too much in my noodle to sleep anyway. I strolled down Clown Alley, around the back yard behind the Big Top, and along the front of the sideshow. There was no one up. The whole circus was dark and silent.

Whatever made me go into the Big Top I don't know. But I did, sort of aimlessly. It was pitch dark inside, like the rest of the circus. Pitch dark, that is, except in one spot. As I entered the main entrance I saw a small light near the ground at the far end!

I had been around circuses long enough to know that the light didn't belong there so I walked forward softly, coming closer and closer to the little light as I cut across the empty rings. I saw the form of a man in the circle of light—a man stooped over. In his hand was a small saw!

My breath really caught in my throat then. The man was crouched at the foot of Val Janis' swaying pole! And he was using a saw to cut a wide notch out of the pole! Weakening the pole so that it, like Waldo's wire, would collapse at the next performance!

In a glance I saw that the notch had already been cut out, and that the man was now re-inserting the notch. I saw a can of putty, a few small nails and a hammer, a can of white paint, near him. Material to hide his deadly work.

Then, in a sudden wild fury, I went for him.

He must have heard me as I came forward, because he jumped up quickly. In a brief instant before I hit him I saw his face—a ludicrous white face with black, drooping lips. The face of Beppo, the clown!

He tumbled back with a little cry as I crashed into him, rolled over on the sawdust. But he had a weapon, and I didn't. He'd grabbed the hammer as he went down, and before I could stop him he brought it down on the side of my head.

I saw stars, pretty lights, blinding flashes, all at the same time. Then my whole body went rubbery, and I slipped off into black nothingness.

Coming out of it slowly, I opened my eyes to daylight. I was lying on a cot in my own tent and there was an incessant pounding in my brain, like somebody was hitting the back of my head with a mallet. There was a strong, sweet odor in the room that I couldn't place at first and then, as my senses returned, recognized.

Chloroform!

I SWUNG my legs down, sat on the edge of the cot. With an effort, I tried to make my sagging memory work. It came slowly at first, then all in a rush. Beppo, weakening the pole on which Janis would perform today!

I shook my head, trying to rid it of the cobwebs. Fuzzily, my mind started working. I'd have to warn Janis. I'd have to cancel his act. I'd have to—

My thoughts came to a sudden, crashing halt. For the first time it made sense to me. Beppo! It was Beppo who was trying to wreck the show! Beppo who had killed Jerry Blade and Waldo! Beppo who would try to kill Janis too!

My mind whirled, spun dizzily. My head was going around in circles, and logical thinking wouldn't come. Then, all at once, a crazy thought came into my mind. Why had Beppo been wearing his make-up at three o'clock in the morning?

Faintly, I heard music. The windjammers playing in the Big Top! Playing music that was discordant, that carried no melody for me at first. Music that suddenly melted into "Don't Fence Me In"!

A quick chill raced through me as I recognized the song. My body was paralyzed for

a moment, then horror drove me to my feet. "Don't Fence Me In" meant that Janis was on the swaying pole!

I staggered from my tent into the sunlight, picked up speed as I raced across the back yard. There were kinkers all around —those whose acts had gone on, those who were waiting to take their cues. But I didn't pay any attention to them. I was racing like a crazy man toward the Big Top.

I burst into the arena just as Janis was getting ready for his final head-stand. Just as Beppo—with murder at his finger tips—was getting ready to sway the pole! The pole whose base would this time crack and crumble, pitching Janis to his death!

I don't know what the audience thought. I didn't care. I just raced across the rings, stumblingly, until I reached the base of the big pole. And before Beppo knew what had happened, I landed on him.

In an instant I had him on his back, beating his clown-face, getting black grease paint and clown-white on my knuckles. I kept pounding him in a mad fury until he lay still. And then quite suddenly it made sense. Everything that had been confused in my mind straightened out—this wasn't Beppo after all.

I took out a handkerchief, rubbed away enough of the paint to make sure. It was Myron Burns!

Janis had come down the pole. Brick Redmond was there. Jack Jay, a host of kinkers, a big cop from Headquarters. Burns came out of it and scrambled to his feet, but by this time the big cop had him covered.

"I figured it was you all the time, Burns," I said. "The Beppo angle confused me for awhile, but it had to be you. You left yourself wide open on two counts."

He just glared at me, a twisted, half-smile on his lips.

"I suspected you," I continued, when you told me the story about Ed Morgan trying to ruin you by wrecking the show. It sounded fishy. I figured if someone wanted to sabotage the circus there were easier ways to do it.

"He could have fired the Big Top, poisoned the cats, wrecked the train we travel on—almost anything. He didn't have to pick the hard way of killing off individual kinkers. I doubt if Ed Morgan ever existed."

Burns said nothing, but stood there stolidly, sneering.

"But," I said, "there was something else that more definitely pointed to you. That was the way Waldo was murdered. His high wire was cut *in the middle.*

"That meant that whoever did the job had to be very much at home on a tight wire. He had to be able to walk out on the wire, kneel down, and cut that wire part way through—a dangerous trick in itself."

"Well, Waldo was the only tight-wire performer in the show. The *only* one, Burns. That made it tough to figure out until I remembered that you were a tight-rope walker in your early days. In other words, outside of Waldo himself, you were the only one in the show who could have cut that wire!"

Burns' lips curled more. His eyes blazed out of his creased face.

"You killed Jerry Blade by waxing his shoes, and you killed Waldo by weakening the high wire. You would have killed Janis, too, by weakening the pole and then swaying it far enough to make it break."

I turned to the cop, told him how I'd encountered a man—presumably Beppo—weakening the pole last night.

"I thought," I said. "It was funny that Beppo would be wearing his make-up at three o'clock in the morning, and while doing a dangerous job like that. But now it's clear.

"Burns knew there was a chance he might be discovered in the act of weakening the pole, so he figured it best to disguise himself. What better way than to make himself up as Beppo and thus throw suspicion on the clown if he was seen?"

BRICK REDMOND was nodding, looking at Burns in something akin to horror. He turned to me.

"Why didn't Burns kill you, after you discovered him?" Redmond said.

"He didn't want to kill me. I was worth more alive. He figured I would cement his case against Beppo by testifying that I'd seen Beppo weakening the pole. So he gave me a dose of chloroform, thinking it would keep me knocked out until Janis' act was over. Luckily, it didn't."

"But the motive!" exploded Redmond.

"I can supply that," cut in Janis. His face was drawn, pale. "You remember that roustabout that was killed a month ago—Mike Lazotti? Well, it was Burns who killed him. He'd have been in the clear and never even suspected, if it hadn't been for Jerry Blade, Waldo, and myself. We witnessed it."

"We made it clear to Burns that we knew

he'd done the job, so he paid us off in higher salaries, bonuses, to keep our mouths shut. We were wrong to accept it, I know—but it looked like a good deal to us. Then Burns must have got jittery, decided to get rid of all three of us."

A bright idea bounced into my head. I look at Burns.

"Things start to make sense," I said. "Mike Lazotti must have been Ed Morgan. He'd joined the circus with the purpose of either sabotaging it or killing you. So you beat him to it."

Burns didn't say anything, but I knew by his expression that I was right. There was only one thing more to clear up. I snapped a question at Burns.

"Where's Beppo? The real Beppo?"

He just glared at me, but there was a guilty look in his eyes. I knew, then, what had happened. It made me feel sick.

"You dirty dog!" I roared at him. "You killed Beppo too. You probably made it look like suicide. After dumping Janis from the pole, you figured you could slip away in the confusion, take off the make-up, come back as Myron Burns. Then, later, we'd find Beppo dead, and the conclusion would be that Beppo had done all three killings and then committed suicide in remorse."

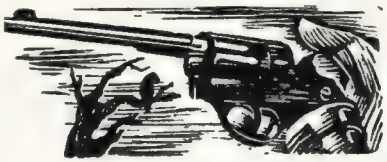
He just looked away. It was right. We found Beppo's body in his own tent in Clown Alley. He'd been shot, and there was a gun with a silencer attached in his hand. Beside him was a typewritten note—a suicide note which Burns had manufactured, to throw the guilt on Beppo.

I shook my head. "Beppo always said tragedy hit the circus in threes. But I guess he never figured he'd be the third victim."

Redmond was staring out of misted eyes. He didn't seem able to grasp it yet.

"The show's finished, with our top acts gone," he muttered.

"No," I said. "Not finished. We still have Janis. And we'll build up Jack Jay and the cats. And, somewhere, we'll find a new high-wire man—maybe not as good as Waldo, but we'll find one. As for Beppo, I guess there'll never be another quite like him. But there'll be others that are plenty good. You know what they say, Brick. The show must go on."



Next Issue's Headliners

SIXTEEN pounds is the exact weight of a bowling ball—a fact which takes on new significance in SIXTEEN POUNDS OF MURDER, by Carl G. Hodges, featured novelet next issue in which Dwight Berke, ghost writer for a champion bowler, is suddenly forced to play detective when murder stalks. This gripping crime novelet scores a perfect thrill strike!

* * * *

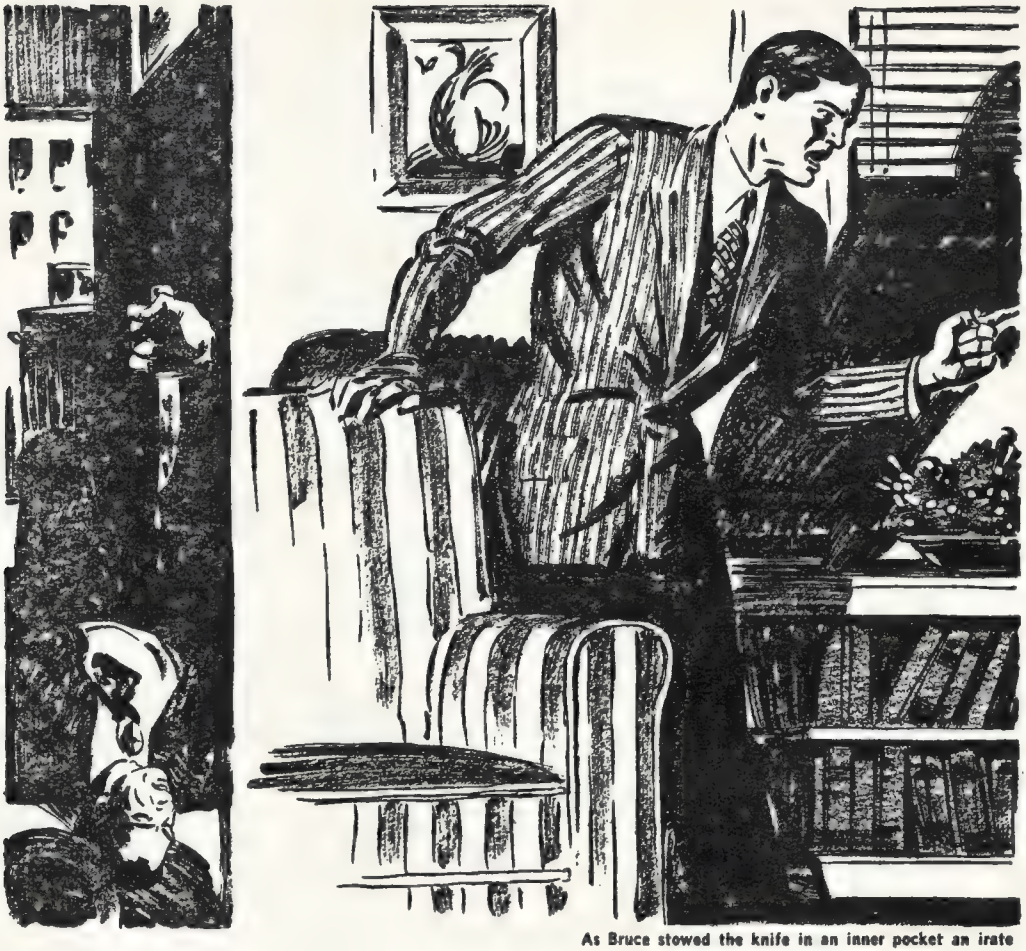
JOHNNY BLAKE, reporter, receives a mysterious message that sends him on an exciting crime trail in MEET THE KILLER, by John L. Benton—a smashing novelet that will hold you breathless from start to finish!

* * * *

MURDER during an evening lawn party at an exclusive Long Island estate is the theme of THE TRIANGULAR BLADE, a baffling novelet by Carter Sprague which packs a walloping surprise at the end! It's a fast-moving, entertaining yarn which will keep you guessing.

* * * *

IN ADDITION to the above headliners, the next issue of THRILLING DETECTIVE will bring you a number of superlative short stories by your favorite authors—each one a winner, hand-picked to please! Be on hand for some real reading thrills!



As Bruce stowed the knife in an inner pocket an irate

A Complete Novelet

THE CORPSE

CHAPTER I

Exit a Blackmailer

DAVE BRUCE settled back in his swivel chair and cocked both legs on the corner of the desk. He regarded the man on the other side of the desk with a dour expression, then threw the several sheets of paper on the blotter pad before him.

"Yes, I'm a newspaper reporter," he said, "and newspapers like to print news. I said news, not dirt. Our sources of information are many and varied. We tell the truth and are proud of it. But when it comes to dealing with scoundrels, we draw the line. Take your written evidence, Mr. Quigg, and on your way across the street, drop it into the sewer and jump in yourself. You ought to get along fine with the bacteria down there. That's all. Get the devil out of here."

The man across the desk jumped to his feet and grabbed the papers as if they were a million dollars in cold cash. He hugged

Reporter Dave Bruce Meets the Deadline for

voice demanded: "What the devil are you doing here?"

FROM RENO

By JOHN L. BENTON

them against his chest.

"Newspapers are supposed to print news, good and bad!" he said defiantly. "Anything that will interest the public is news. Lots of papers began by printing sensational stories and this story I have is one of the most sensational any paper ever laid their hands on."

Dave Bruce grimaced. "Look here, Mr. Quigg, you're a blackmailer. A sadly frustrated blackmailer without the amount of brains your intended victim has. You're the type of person who drives people to suicide, to mental depression. You break up families and cause sorrow that can never be cured. You seize a man's heart and soul and squeeze them until they bleed money. But this time you're licked, and I don't know why I'm not calling the police to make a pinch."

Quigg, short, slim and thin-faced, gave him a nasty smile. A peculiar sort of humor, for his mouth wasn't built to smile. It was nothing more than a thin slit across his face.

"You admit that Andrew Dutton is news," Quigg said. "That anything Andrew Dutton

Solving a Mystery of Blackmail and Murder!

does or has happen to him is news."

"Of course I admit that," Dave Bruce retorted angrily. "But you're asking me to print a story to the effect that Andrew Dutton is bigamously married, that his first wife still lives, that she has married again too. That isn't news. It's an unfortunate occurrence in a man's private life and I'll have nothing to do with it. You demanded that he pay for your silence and he refused. He'd have nothing to do with you. So you came here, to make him pay by suffering unwholesome publicity. Are you getting out, or do I throw you out?"

"I'll go," Quigg snapped. "Sure I'll go—to every other newspaper in town. Somebody will print it. I ain't asking money."

"And before you leave this building, I'll telephone every editor and have them sick the dogs on you," growled Bruce. "In one minute I'll lose my temper completely."

QUIGG seemed to think that might happen, because he made a hasty retreat, still clutching those papers against his chest. Bruce arose and opened two windows. He had an idea the office was contaminated. Then he started telephoning other editors and reporters. Quigg wasn't going to get that story published. Not about Andrew Dutton.

Dave Bruce didn't even know Dutton. But he did know that Dutton had built a charity wing to the local hospital, that he donated his time and money to all worthy causes, and that his life was exemplary. He was successful to an astonishing degree, and just as honest. If he had been married before and had married again without benefit of divorce, that was his affair to straighten out. But no frustrated blackmailer was going to peddle that story. Not to any newspaper Dave Bruce worked on.

A half-hour passed, which Bruce spent writing an obit on a man who wasn't dead yet, but his chances of living were slim. There was an invitation on Bruce's desk from the prison warden inviting him to attend the execution. Dave Bruce had never seen one, and he had no desire now to attend any of them.

He looked up from his typewriter, to see bulky Sergeant Connelly of Homicide approaching his glass-enclosed office. Connelly knew everyone and waved to the reporters who hailed him, but the detective's face was grim.

"Hi," Bruce said, and grinned. "Park and give me the lowdown on the latest murder, Sarge. Things have been kind of slow lately. You fellows falling down on the job?"

Connelly laughed as he sat down.

"Well, you see, Dave," he said, "we're handicapped. We've got to wait until somebody is knocked off. Sometimes that happens so fast we can't keep up, and then again we can take it easy. You had a visitor a little while ago. Little guy who looked like a combination of Uriah Heep and Herr Goebbels?"

"You describe him rather well," Dave Bruce said, as he nodded. "Yes, he was here. Don't tell me he took those papers to the police and wanted the certain gentleman they concerned locked up?"

"Well no, not exactly," Connelly said. "The police came to him, but he didn't tell us much. A bit of trouble with his throat. Somebody slit it about twenty minutes ago—in the alley right behind this building."

Bruce sat bolt upright. "No! You're kidding."

"You can take a run over to the morgue and see for yourself if you like," Connelly grunted. "I'm assigned to the job of finding out who slit him. One of your copy boys happened by and remarked that the guy had been visiting you a short time ago. That's why I came. Now suppose you tell me what he wanted and what's all this talk about his going to the police concerning a certain gentleman."

Bruce slowly tapped a cigarette on the edge of his desk.

"Sarge," he said, after a moment, "I don't know that I should tell you, even though I also realize I must. That man's name was Quigg. Jeremy Quigg, I think he said. He came here and wanted me to print a story about someone. A particularly nasty story about this person's past life wherein he seems to have made a mistake or something. I gathered that Quigg had tried to blackmail this person, been told to go to the devil, and he was trying to get the story printed. Just to show the man he couldn't tell Quigg off. Do you follow me, Sarge?"

Connelly nodded heavily. "Yes, sure I do. Quigg was murdered. It happened mighty fast. He was seen leaving this building. Then he disappeared all of a sudden. Somebody had grabbed him, yanked his carcass down that alley and into a deep delivery doorway. One slice of the knife and Quigg was a goner. Now suppose you tell me who this gent was

that Quigg tried to blackmail."

"I shouldn't," Bruce warned.

"Don't get stubborn," Connelly said pleasantly. "This is murder, and murder always has a reason. This man he tried to blackmail has an excellent motive. Give, Davie."

Dave Bruce shrugged. "You're right, of course. I'll trade. For his identity I want the low-down. So I can write a story. I know you'll come through. And so—the man is Andrew Dutton. THE Andrew Dutton."

Connelly gulped. "No kidding! That's going to make it tough. Especially on me. Why, Dutton paid all my wife's expenses a couple of years ago when I wasn't too well off and she needed a lot of hospital care. Dave, are you sure?"

"Positive. Didn't Quigg have papers on him pertaining to Dutton's past?"

"He was stripped of everything," said Connelly. "Not even a match in his pockets. Dave, I've got to see Dutton. Suppose he gives me a big yarn about this, saying that he knows nothing concerning it? What'll I do? Browbeat a guy like him?"

"If Dutton tells you he didn't kill Quigg, I think you can believe him," Bruce said.

"Can I, though? That's the big question, Dave. You see, when I pulled up in the squad car I saw Andrew Dutton walking fast down the street. I had a good look at him. There was no mistake."

Dave Bruce whistled. "It's your headache, Sarge. I'll probably see Dutton myself as soon as possible. This is going to make an awful mess and he doesn't deserve it. Thanks for coming. Now I've got a story to write. How about those details?"

BRUCE made notes as Connelly talked. Then he transcribed them into an interesting story, but left out all reference to Quigg's visit to the office and his motives for that visit. Dave Bruce wanted to talk with Dutton before he went any further.

He slipped out of the office before his city editor could spot him. By now the news of Quigg's visit must have gone all over the place. Bruce would have to tell all soon, but until he knew where Dutton stood, he wanted to keep what he did know to himself.

He climbed aboard his somewhat rickety coupé and drove to Dutton's home. It was on the East Side. One of those four-story private dwellings that don't look like much from the outside, but which are veritable palaces within.

A butler, not stony-faced or terribly formal, let him in. The butler asked him to wait, and a moment later returned to escort him into the living room where Andrew Dutton sat alone, rotating a highball glass between his fingers. Bruce noticed that the glass contained a healthy hooker of straight whisky.

"I've been expecting you." Dutton shook hands without arising. "I know he went to your office. I followed him there. I know he is dead, that he has been murdered, and that I will probably be at the very top of any list of suspects. In fact, I've been wondering what has been keeping the police."

Bruce sat down. "They'll be here soon, sir," he said. "I want you to know this. Quigg told me the whole story, showed me the evidence he had, and I told him to go to the devil. I didn't know he would take me up on it quite so literally. He's dead, with a sliced throat. That means this whole mess is going to become public. If he hadn't been killed, I'd have forgotten the incident."

Dutton took a sip of his drink. "I didn't think a newspaper would print that stuff," he said thoughtfully. "Oh—mind you, it's perfectly true. I'm at fault, in a way. Naturally I'd like to present my side. Quigg came here, showed me the proof and demanded money. The alternative was publicity. I'd never pay blackmail. Wouldn't even consider it."

"You're a wise man," the reporter commended. "You were married before then?"

"Yes. To a woman named Mary. That was twenty-three years ago. We were happy enough. I wasn't wealthy then, but I was getting started. My work entailed a great deal of travel. This particular night we were caught between cities and we lodged at a small frame hotel. It burned down during the night. I awoke. Mary wasn't in the room.

"I looked for her until the flames threatened to sear me. Then I jumped from a second-story window. Mary was nowhere about. In the morning when the ashes cooled, they found evidence that a woman had been burned to death. Mary was the only woman unaccounted for. I buried that woman, grieved over her. I honestly was certain Mary was dead."

"And she isn't." Dave Bruce sighed. "But it was a natural mistake. How did Quigg hope that would make you pay up?"

Dutton looked into the bottom of his glass

"There was some talk that I'd set the building on fire purposely," he said slowly. "To kill her. We hadn't been getting along. Mary was—well, to put it mildly, she liked fun. She spent money faster than I could make it, got into scrapes. I suppose I hated her. Quigg had no evidence as to that, but he knew the whole story."

From where he sat, Bruce could look out onto the street. He saw that a detective cruiser had pulled up and that Sergeant Connelly was getting out.

"The police are here," he said. "Before they butt in, tell me where your first wife is. If you know. Frankly, Mr. Dutton, they're going to make an arrest. The whole thing will come out. I want to reach your first wife before anyone else does. She may have the answer to this."

"You're going to help me?" Dutton seemed amazed.

"Why not?" Bruce asked. "You've spent the last five or six years helping everyone else. Sure I'm a reporter. I'll publish the whole story of this, but I want it to be the truth and told from both angles. I don't think you murdered Quigg, even though you were seen in the vicinity where the murder was committed."

Dutton closed his eyes, as if he had been slapped hard across the face.

"Do they know that already?" he asked. "Yes, I was there. I told you I followed Quigg. I wanted to see what he'd really do, so I could prepare my defense. I waited outside the building. When he emerged, I could tell by the expression on his face that he hadn't had much luck. I left almost immediately."

"That wasn't soon enough," Dave Bruce said. The door buzzer was sounding. "Tell me how to get out of here without the police seeing me. I need a head start."

CHAPTER II

Bloody Evidence

ANDREW DUTTON gave Bruce directions, adding the address of his first wife. The reporter was passing through the kitchen as the butler admitted Connelly and another detective.

Bruce went directly to his car, studied the address Dutton had given him and drove there at once. It was across the river, in a quiet suburban section. The house was modest, neat and tidy-looking. Dave Bruce rang the bell.

A woman with gray hair opened the door. She wore gold-rimmed glasses, seemed to be quite intelligent, and gave an excellent impression.

"Is your name Mary?" Bruce asked.

"Yes," she replied. "Mary Marley. I don't seem to know you."

"My name is Dave Bruce. I'm a reporter. May I come in, Mrs. Marley? It's very important. About—your first husband."

One hand flew to her throat. "You mean—Andrew?" she gasped.

Dave Bruce nodded. "Nobody else."

He followed her into a neat little living room. There was a man about her age playing solitaire near the further window. He removed shell-rimmed glasses and arose. He was about six feet tall, angular and thin.

"This is my husband," Mrs. Marley said. "Sig, this man is a reporter and he's here about Andrew. I've been—afraid of this for a long time. Terribly afraid."

Sig Marley scowled. "Before you speak your piece, Mr. Bruce, and ask a lot of questions, let me say this. My wife and I were married fifteen years ago. She told me all about Andrew Dutton, but she assumed he was dead, that he had been trapped in a hotel fire. She, herself, nearly succumbed. In fact, she forgot who she was from the shock. They found her, several days later, wandering around a city three hundred miles from the scene of the fire."

"But you certainly tried to find your husband when you recovered your memory?" Bruce asked the woman.

"Oh yes," she said. "Of course I did. I went back to the town. They told me a body had been found in the ashes. At first, they thought it was that of a woman, but a further examination proved it was a man. No one seemed to know Andrew, so I assumed it was his body. There had been a ring on the dead man's finger. The stone had come out of it, but I was sure I recognized the ring as Andrew's.

"I went away. The body had already been buried. I married Sig some time later. Two years ago we moved here. Sig's business required that he live close to New York. I often saw the name of Andrew Dutton, but never any photographs of him. I didn't even suspect he was the Andrew Dutton who had been my husband."

The reporter shook his head slowly.

"Dutton thought that body in the ruins was yours," he said. "He also married again and has become a wealthy man. Mrs. Marley, today Dutton is an important person. He is noted for his philanthropies and his goodness. His wife is a woman of considerable standing. Now it seems both you and he are bigamously married."

"Yes," she said. "I know. That's why I kept quiet about it. Very quiet. I wanted nothing of Andrew's. Not a penny. Sig has enough, and I love him more than I ever loved Andrew. I wanted to keep things as they are now. Andrew never harmed me. We were both honestly mistaken, that's all. I'm glad he isn't dead, but it certainly complicates things."

"It' a mess," Sig Marley agreed. "I don't see any way out of it now that the newspapers have hold of the story. Look here, Mr. Bruce, do you think the public of this great nation would miss a great deal if they never knew?"

Bruce drew a long breath. "The public is going to hear all about it," he said, a little grimly. "Unfortunately, someone else knew the story and went to the trouble of getting certified copies of the marriage certificate and statements from people who knew you and Andrew, Mrs. Marley. This man Quigg tried to blackmail Andrew, and was thrown out of Dutton's place. He came to the newspaper where I work and tried to peddle the story. He got thrown out again."

"But if you wouldn't print the story, will any other paper?" Marley asked.

"Quigg is dead," Bruce explained. "He was murdered two minutes after leaving our office. The incriminating papers were stolen from his body and Andrew Dutton is going to be arrested for the murder."

Mary Marley stood up quickly.

"Sig, I've got to go to him!" she exclaimed. He may need help. I must go!"

"I'll go with you," Sig Marley said.

DAVE BRUCE left quietly, but, as he drove away, he was overtaken by a car with Marley at the wheel and Mary Marley beside him, pale and worried-looking. The reporter sighed. Two happy families were going to be broken up by this.

It could so easily have been solved by cooperation, too. There could have been a divorce, then Dutton could have remarried his present wife and Mary Marley could have remarried the man she married fifteen years before.

Bruce drove back to Dutton's place. Perhaps the present Mrs. Dutton could be of some help. But when Bruce got there, reporters were having a field day. Mrs. Dutton seemed either to have thrown the house open to them or they had forced their way in. Photographers were snapping shots of her and of her twenty-four or twenty-five-year-old son by a former marriage.

With Dutton's arrest he had ceased to be an important and charitable man who commanded respect. He was just an accused murderer now.

Dave Bruce avoided the excited group, slipped quietly down the hallway and went upstairs without being seen. He turned once and looked down at Mrs. Dutton. She was white-haired and answered perfectly to the one-word description of "patrician." She was slim, a handsome woman, and in the face of the barrage of questions, she conducted herself coolly.

Bruce entered one of the upstairs rooms at random. It appeared to be Dutton's stepson's quarters for there were college banners, slightly faded, on the walls. The reporter wanted to know something about this young man. He hadn't been especially attracted to the fellow who seemed to be sullen and overbearing.

Dave Bruce excused his curiosity and his present somewhat burglarious activities with the mental reservation that he was trying to help Dutton. He opened several bureau drawers. In one he found six pairs of dice. They were cleverly made and as crooked as a pig's tail. There were cards, too, with tiny indentations so that anyone in the know could use his fingers to read them. Arthur Dutton—the young man had taken his step-father's name—it seemed, was a cheat.

Bruce put everything back carefully, passed into another room which he decided was Dutton's upstairs study. It was equipped with a large desk and some worn furniture. He strolled into the bathroom adjoining it. There was a crumpled towel in the basket. He picked it up. The towel was slightly pink in spots, but there was one definitely blood-red mark on the edge of it. The soap had been used recently, for it was still damp.

Frowning, the reporter went back to the study. He saw the fireplace and noticed ashes in the grate. Ashes—and a bit of charred,

half-burned cloth. It seemed to be the cuff of a man's shirt. It was almost buried under the other ashes.

He didn't touch that, but knelt to examine it more carefully. He noticed that one side of the fireplace grate was covered with soot.

Lighting a match, he held it into the chimney and peered up it. He reached behind the damper he saw there and removed a short-handled, thin-bladed knife. It was blood-stained and sharp as a razor.

Dave Bruce's eyes widened in surprise. All this looked as if Dutton had killed Quigg, had tried to hide the evidences of his crime, and not done any too well at it. Undoubtedly his hands and shirt cuff had become bloody. Slicing a man's throat is a bloody business.

Something about that fireplace, though, made the reporter pause in his first impulse to consider Dutton guilty. He pursed his lips, frowned in deep thought, and had unconsciously stowed the knife in an inner pocket when a voice behind him demanded irately:

"What the devil are you doing here? Does trouble in a home mean that reporters can snoop as they like?"

Bruce turned quickly. Arthur Dutton had slipped quietly into that room. The reporter wondered how long he'd been there.

"I'm sorry," Bruce apologized. "Believe me, I was only trying to help your step-father. I'm the reporter that blackmailer visited just before he was killed. I talked to your step-father before he was arrested. I don't think he killed Quigg, and I want to prove it."

"We have police for that purpose," Arthur snapped. "Personally, I'm under the impression you'd like nothing better than to pin the crime on my father. It would make sensational stories for days on end. Get out of here! If you come back, I'll see that you are arrested."

"Okay," Dave Bruce snapped. "I know I'm wrong, and you can believe what you like. But I'll add one thing. It's plain to see that Dutton is only your step-father. If an ounce of his blood ran in your veins, you'd at least have a tendency toward being a gentleman."

YOUNG DUTTON doubled up his fists and advanced a pace or two. Then he came to a slow halt. Something told him this lean, grim-faced reporter could not only take it, but could hand it out in generous quantities. He turned sharply and walked away.

Dave Bruce left the house, sat in his car for fully half an hour, and tried to puzzle it all out. Dutton certainly had had a motive for killing Quigg. He had had the opportunity as well, and now there was the bloody towel, the burned shirt sleeve and the concealed knife.

The only thing that kept Bruce from jumping at the inevitable and apparent conclusion were two items. The ashes in the fireplace—and the fact that Dutton was a smart man. Much too smart to dispose of incriminating evidence in such a slipshod fashion.

The reporter realized that the only man who could explain these things, or deny them, was Dutton himself. He drove to Police Headquarters where he encountered a little trouble in gaining admittance to Dutton's cell. But he wangled it by sending in his name through a genial turnkey and getting Dutton's permission.

Dutton sat on the edge of the wooden pallet, looking none too comfortable. He puffed on an expensive Havana and greeted Bruce with a half-hearted smile.

"Odd place to find me, isn't it?" he asked. "Have you discovered anything? I felt sure you wouldn't believe me guilty."

"I discovered a great deal," Dave Bruce said slowly. "I talked to Mary, your first wife. She's happily married, and believed you had died in that hotel fire. She wants to help you. Did she come here?"

"No." Dutton shrugged. "What could she do anyway? I expect, being a woman, she'll go to my wife and try to comfort her. How did Mary look?"

"Fine," Bruce told him. "She's slender still, and must have been very pretty when she was younger. She wears gold-rimmed glasses now. She lives in a neat little house just outside of Windhurst. Her husband appears to be a quiet, home-loving type of man."

"She was pretty," Dutton said musingly. "And she always had trouble with her eyes. I'm not surprised at the glasses. I tried to get her to wear them, but she was a bit sensitive. Thanks for breaking the news to her. I know you did it tactfully."

Bruce winced. "Perhaps I did, but I can't be tactful with you, Mr. Dutton. I prowled through your house. Your step-son is—well, mildly, a cheat."

"You discovered that, eh?" Dutton frowned darkly. "Do me a favor and say nothing to my wife. The boy is headstrong, a spendthrift and he refuses to work, but she thinks

he is an ideal young man. Like all mothers she will be the last person to learn that her son isn't exactly what he appears to be. I've known for some time."

"That isn't all," Bruce went on. "In the bathroom off your study I found evidence that someone had washed up there. Washed blood off his hands. I discovered the ashes of a man's shirt in the fireplace grate and, hidden in the chimney, I found this."

Bruce extended the blade. Dutton looked at it for a full minute, then his shoulders sagged. He eyed the tip of his cigar for another full minute before he spoke.

"How much can I trust you, young man?" he finally said. "I mean, how far would you go for me? On the basis of what I have tried to do for people? I can't be all bad, you see."

"Right now," Dave Bruce said, "I think I'd go the limit, sir. That evidence could have been planted."

"No," Dutton said. "I put the knife in the chimney myself. I killed Quigg. I had to. He was on his way to ruin my life. But I don't want this known yet. I must get out of here for a little while. It can be managed. My attorney is working on it now. Just keep my secret, and when I'm ready to give myself up, I shall make certain you get the exclusive story. Will you do this for me?"

Dave Bruce looked at Dutton hard, sizing the man up once more after this amazing confession. Dutton looked back at him, candidly, straight in the eyes. In a moment Bruce nodded.

"Sure I'll do that, sir," he agreed. "Especially now, since I know very well you're lying to protect someone. My guess is that it's Arthur. He isn't worth it, but that's your business. I'll see you later, Mr. Dutton, and you can trust me. Just don't do anything rash."

Dutton did not reply.

CHAPTER III

Park Bench Murder

DAVE BRUCE banged on the cell door, was released, and in a short time he was back in his office writing the story of Jeremy Quigg's murder. Or that part of it which he chose to write. For the first time in his reportorial career, he held something back—Dutton's confession, because he didn't believe it. Not a single word of it.

Bruce passed his story over to the city desk, lit a cigarette and leaned back to contemplate all the angles. He eliminated Dutton entirely. The man was not a killer. Nothing would have made him take a human life.

The reporter considered Mary Marley and her husband, Sig, for a moment or two, but decided they could hardly be involved. If Mary Marley had wanted to she could have simply gone to Dutton, announced that she claimed a share of his money and got it. What could she have hoped to gain by having Quigg murdered?

Arthur Dutton was a headache. To Bruce it was painfully clear that the elder Dutton had confessed to the murder solely to keep the blame from being pinned on the shoulders of his step-son. Not so much for Arthur's sake as for his mother's. By this ruse, Dutton had probably hoped to prevent Dave Bruce from delving any deeper into the mess.

Jeremy Quigg, however, was the chief puzzle. Who was he, really? Where had he obtained his information and those incriminating documents? Was he a professional blackmailer, or had he stumbled on the evidence and tried his hand at living without working? Dave Bruce felt he had to know more about Quigg.

He telephoned Sergeant Connelly who told him that Quigg had lived in a rooming house on Ellis Place. Number 27.

"We went through his room," Connelly said, "but there was nothing there. By the way, Dave, Dutton just got out. He hadn't been indicted by the grand jury, so his lawyers produced a habeas corpus. With anyone except Dutton it wouldn't have worked, but influence and Dutton's reputation did the trick. We had nothing too definite on him, anyway, of course. No eye witnesses. Purely circumstantial, and the fact that he had a motive."

"Do you still believe in his innocence, Sarge?" Bruce queried.

"I'm not so sure now," Connelly replied slowly. "Not sure at all. You learn anything else?"

"Nothing," Dave Bruce lied. "I hunted up Dutton's first wife and broke the news to her."

"Yes, I know. She went to Dutton's house and talked to his present wife. Seems like a nice person—his first wife—anxious to straighten things out. She could make a lot

of trouble for Dutton, you know. Keep me posted if you find anything, Dave."

The reporter hung up and thought of the knife in his pocket. He had wrapped it in a handkerchief to preserve fingerprints, but he realized that the chances of there being any were slim. He put it far back in a drawer of his desk, and ripped the page off his note pad, on which he had written the late Quigg's address. Half an hour later he was bribing the landlady to let him inspect Quigg's quarters.

She preceded the reporter up the narrow staircase, jabbering as she climbed.

"He wasn't so much," she declared. "Came here five months ago and got behind in his rent right away. I was ready to put him out when he must have made a killing of some kind because he paid up and also gave me three months' rent in advance. Never worked. Slept most of the day and stayed out until all hours.

"Not the kind of a man I like rooming in my house, but you can't be too choosey, I say. Never had any visitors I know of. No phone calls either, and no mail. I don't think he had any friends at all. Anybody who would have been friendly with him would have been of the same stripe. I'm glad he's out of here. Don't mean nothing to me long as he's paid up. This is his room."

"Thank you," Dave Bruce said gravely. "In all my years as a reporter you're the most ideal subject I ever interviewed. Without my asking a single question you have told me a great deal about Mr. Quigg."

"I keep my eyes open and my mouth shut," she said curtly. "Stay out of trouble that way. You can leave when you're ready."

Bruce closed the door and turned on the lights. It was a shabby room, fitted with second-hand furniture which had seen much better days.

The place already had been searched. So much was quite plain, but the reporter sensed that Quigg had been a crafty, sly individual who would know how to hide things. Most of all, Bruce wanted to find out if Quigg's blackmail attempt had been his first one, or if he had been a professional.

HE PULLED bureau drawers completely out and looked into the recesses they fitted. He pulled the window shade off its roller, and even examined the roller. He removed bed coverings and prodded the mattress thoroughly. There was nothing.

He checked through the drawers. In one he found a screw-driver. It seemed to be brand new. Hefting this, Bruce looked around for something that was screwed down. The window!

He went over to it. The frame was held in place by screws and two of them were freshly scratched. Applying the screw-driver he found that the old frame did not have to be pried away. It loosened as he removed the screws. As the frame fell away, Bruce saw an envelope, folded and jammed behind the pulley ropes. He reached for it, in a moment of triumph—and disaster.

The blow was hard. Sufficient to knock Dave Bruce senseless in an instant, and to bring on an enveloping darkness that lasted for what seemed to be years and years. . . .

When Bruce awoke, he was alone in the room and the possessor of a brand-new headache that reached down from his head to his toes. He slapped cold water over his face, felt a little better, and looked around.

The envelope that had been concealed in the window was, of course, gone. The room door was ajar. Apparently the intruder had been in the room before the reporter had arrived, had heard him coming and taken refuge somewhere else. Then he had waited for an opportune moment to take action.

Dave Bruce patted his pockets. They had been searched, and he was glad that he had left the knife in his office. But why had he been searched? For the knife? Only Dutton knew he had it, although Arthur may have suspected, could even have seen him remove it from the fireplace, Dave reflected. Arthur Dutton was looming more and more as the brains behind all of this.

A glance at his watch told the reporter that he had been unconscious for some time. His office would be wondering what had happened.

He went downstairs. There he met the landlady who seemed surprised he had remained this long and denied that she had let anyone else in.

Bruce asked permission to use the phone and called his paper.

"Come, come," the city editor chided when he answered. "Why the delay, Dave? Let's have all the details. This is big stuff and we don't want to get beat on it."

"Just what are you talking about?" Bruce asked with a rising note of apprehension.

"Do you mean to tell me you're not down at Oliver Park?" the city editor barked.

"Where Dutton just blew his brains out? Dave, what's wrong? I gave orders to get you on the job. Where have you been?"

"Sleeping," Dave Bruce grunted. "I'll call back as soon as I can."

His car was still out in front of the rooming house and he drove it to the small public park not far from the slum area where Quigg had lived. There were police cars around, a crowd of curious people, and the morgue wagon was drawn up. Dave saw Sergeant Connelly and hurried over to him.

"Well, I always said you never could tell what a man would do if pressed," Connelly said. "Whether he is rich or poor. That's Dutton on the park bench."

Dave Bruce approached the figure. It was Dutton all right, dressed in old, seedy-looking clothes, and incongruously wearing gloves that must have cost twenty dollars. He had been shot through the left temple. The bench on which he sat was pushed back against some thick and tall bushes. Connelly stepped over to the reporter's side.

"He was your baby, Dave," the sergeant rumbled. "You had a lot of confidence in him. So did I, but it's all pretty clear now. He killed Quigg, knew we'd eventually get the goods on him, and chose this way out of his troubles."

"I'll believe that when it's proved," Bruce snapped. "Not before."

"Okay." Connelly shrugged. "Come over here and I'll prove it. We've got witnesses."

For Bruce's benefit three people made practically the same statements they had already made to the police. They had been strolling through the park. They had seen Dutton seated on the bench, had watched him raise his hand and fire a bullet through his own head. They had seen his arm drop, and heard the gun clatter to the sidewalk.

Three pair of eyes had seen it done. There was a street light not too far away, throwing enough light on the scene so that no one could accuse those witnesses of using too active imaginations.

"Looks like the old boy went a trifle berserk," Connelly went on. "He stopped at a used clothing store and swapped in his expensive clothes for that old bum's suit, the gray shirt and battered hat. He kept only the gloves he had been wearing."

"But he went home after he got out of jail?" Dave Bruce queried.

"Sure he did. Why?"

"Because that's the only place his murderer could have got in touch with him. Sarge, you're all wrong about this."

CONNELLY heaved a deep sigh of despair. "Dave, he was your baby, like I said. Naturally you want to clear him, but how? The evidence is right here. Even men in serious trouble like Dutton was wouldn't commit suicide unless they were guilty. And don't tell me it wasn't suicide."

Dave Bruce walked back to the bench on which the body still sat. He saw that the bench had been moved back against the shrubs. He turned to Connelly.

"I'll prove those people only thought they saw him commit suicide," he said firmly. "First, have those witnesses stand exactly where they were when they saw it. Then give me your service pistol. Oh, don't worry, I'm not going to plug anybody."

Connelly handed over his gun with some doubt written on his broad face. He ordered everyone away from the bench, told the witnesses to take the places where they had been when the shot had been fired. Then Connelly looked for the reporter and couldn't find him.

Suddenly one of the witnesses yelled. Connelly looked at the body on the bench. It seemed to be moving. One hand was slowly rising, and it held a gun. Connelly's gun. The weapon rose until it was pointed at the lolling head.

"Okay!" Connelly called. "You can come out of those bushes now, Dave. I'm convinced, and I think the witnesses are too."

Bruce broke through the shrubs and handed Connelly his gun.

"Dutton was lured to this particular bench," he said. "He was told to don those old clothes, but to keep his gloves so the person he was to meet would recognize him. Why old clothes? Why, to make it seem as though Dutton wanted to disguise himself, commit suicide, and hope he would never be recognized. That would go with the character of a proud and wealthy man, in great trouble bent on suicide. Just a little touch, but highly effective."

"Who did it?" Connelly asked quickly.

"I don't know yet."

Dave Bruce called the witnesses over.

"I want you to think back hard," he told them. "You saw the dead man's arm raise. But despite the fair amount of light in this spot, it would be difficult to see an arm, darkly clothed, and a hand with dark gloves

move much. Maybe you saw a white shirt cuff?"

"Yes!" one of them said. "Yes, I did see a white shirt cuff. But he isn't wearing a white shirt."

"He crossed up the killer by buying an old gray workshirt," Bruce said. The murderer got him here, as I said. Perhaps he slugged him. At any rate, he waited until some people were fairly close by, then he reached through the shrubs, raised his arm in a position that could look as if it were the victim who moved. He fired the shot, let his arm fall slowly, and dropped the gun. Then he got out of here. He told Dutton to wear gloves because he had to wear them so no fingerprints would be on the gun."

"But who?" Connelly asked again.

"Maybe I'll answer that before long, Sarge. Right now I can't. You might help, though. See if any detectives on your anti-gambling squad can identify Quigg."

CHAPTER IV

Out of The Past

GOING back to his car, Dave Bruce drove away. He proceeded directly to Mrs. Dutton's home and was instantly admitted. Mrs. Dutton, her son, Arthur, and Mrs. Marley were in the living room.

Mary Marley was crying softly, but Mrs. Dutton was holding up amazingly well. They had already learned the news of Dutton's death. Arthur dispelled any doubts about that.

"It's all your fault!" he stormed at the reporter. "You as good as killed my father. If you and the rest of your kind had let us alone, this could have been settled."

"Arthur," his mother said in a tired voice, "you're wrong, and you know it. This man was trying his best to help. Mr. Bruce, is there anything I can do?"

"Tell me what happened when Mr. Dutton returned home from Police Headquarters," Bruce said.

"Why—he didn't seem overjoyed. It was the first time he ever came in without kissing me, but he had so much on his mind. He went into the study. There was a telephone call for him."

"Ah," Dave Bruce broke in. "Who from? Did he say?"

"No. He only told me he had to go out again, in a hurry, and that I wasn't to worry at all. That everything would come out all right."

"I want you to show me the study where he got the call," Bruce said, and took Mrs. Dutton by the elbow. "Dutton," he said to Arthur, "stay here and keep Mrs. Marley company."

Upstairs, Bruce helped Mrs. Dutton into a chair.

"I just wanted to talk to you alone for a moment," he told her. "How is Mrs. Marley taking all this?"

"She's terribly upset, poor thing," Mrs. Dutton answered. "Andrew, of course, told me about his married life with her. It wasn't very happy, but perhaps they were both at fault."

"And what do you think of her present husband?" Bruce queried casually.

"Why—I haven't met him. She has been here twice, but Mr. Marley simply drove her here and then called for her later. I imagine he feels a bit odd about the way things have turned out."

"I should imagine so," the reporter grunted. "Thanks, Mrs. Dutton."

Before he left the room, he walked over to the fireplace. The ashes and the piece of shirt cuff were still in the grate. He said nothing about them.

Downstairs, he indicated there was little left for him to do.

"Death puts an end to all things," he said slowly. "There will be, of necessity, some unpleasant publicity, but it will blow over soon. I'll tone down the story I have to write now as much as possible. And if I can help either of you ladies, in any way, call on me, please."

But Dave Bruce didn't go to his office. He proceeded straight to the little suburban cottage where Mr. and Mrs. Marley lived. The house was locked and nobody answered his ring. Bruce smashed a low window with his foot, raised the sash, and crawled through. He spent about twenty minutes in the house and emerged with a grim look and a single bit of paper which he had found in a trunk in the attic.

He stopped at a drug store and telephoned Sergeant Connelly, asking him to be at Mrs. Dutton's home as soon as possible, and to make sure everyone stayed there.

Half an hour later, Dave Bruce was admitted to the house. Mrs. Dutton, Mrs.

Marley, and Arthur Dutton all looked at him with considerable worry.

Connelly had some news.

"I had several men assigned to the Vice Squad look over Quigg's body," he said. "They recognized him all right. He was a combination dishwasher and errand boy at a joint called the Cody Club."

"Ever been there, Arthur?" Dave Bruce whirled on the young man.

"Me?" Arthur Dutton colored slightly. "No. No, of course not. I don't frequent dives."

"I see," Bruce said shortly. "Maybe you will tell the truth before we're finished. Mrs. Marley, I don't want to rush you, but when do you expect your husband to call?"

Mrs. Marley looked at her watch. "Why, he should be here soon now. I'd better get ready."

"Wait just one moment," Bruce begged. "I want to ask you a question. Just a single, simple question. You married Mr. Marley at Las Vegas, fifteen years ago. He is the only husband you've had since you believed Mr. Dutton had died?"

"But of course," Mrs. Marley said.

"Then who is the man your marriage license says you divorced? I have that license and you filled it in as a divorced woman. Now isn't it possible that you didn't believe Dutton was dead, and that you went through a legal Nevada divorce which he never even heard about?"

SLOWLY Mrs. Marley got to her feet. "I don't know what you're driving at, young man," she said coldly. "I really don't."

"Then I'll tell you bluntly," Dave Bruce said. "I think you knew Dutton was alive, but you didn't know where, and you didn't care. Fifteen years ago Dutton was practically unknown. He made his fortune over a short period of time, after your marriage to Marley. Do you intend to claim any part of his estate?"

"I do not," Mrs. Marley declared hotly. "I'd never even given it a thought."

"I'll bet," Dave Bruce said. "But then, you didn't have to think about it. So long as no one knew you'd divorced him, and believed you were his legal spouse, Dutton's estate would go to you automatically. You wouldn't even have to claim it."

Mrs. Marley was crimson. "Do you mean to tell me I had anything to do with this?"

"Everything," the reporter declared flatly. "Helped by Mr. Marley, of course. Here is just how it came about. Not realizing that Andrew Dutton would some day become a rich man, Mrs. Marley divorced him and married Marley. She hasn't the slightest claim to any portion of this estate. But Dutton didn't know he'd been divorced. If she went to him and made a formal demand for money, as his wife, Dutton would have investigated. Perhaps he'd have discovered she divorced him and such chances couldn't be taken.

"Therefore, Jeremy Quigg was turned into a potential blackmailer, and he broke the news to Dutton. Quigg was then murdered. By Mr. Marley or someone he hired for that purpose. Quigg tried to bleed Dutton, found it was impossible, just as Mr. Marley knew it would be. Then he was sent to a newspaper, and was killed as he left.

"It worked better than the Marleys hoped, because Dutton actually followed Quigg and was seen near the scene of the crime. Quigg did, however, leave a letter about the affair. He didn't trust Marley. I almost got that letter, but Marley was just a bit smarter than I was."

"Are you positive of all this, Mr. Bruce?" Mrs. Dutton asked. "It's a dreadful accusation."

"It most certainly is," he agreed. "I first became suspicious when Dutton told me that it had been impossible for him to get along with his wife, Mary. He said she spent too much money. How come she changed so? Now she is a quiet, home-loving woman living in a pretty little bungalow with a devoted husband—who, by the way, doesn't care to show his face around here. I doubted that Mrs. Marley could have changed so completely. And I also discovered she had been living in that pretty little cottage for only five months."

"I don't get it," Connelly broke in. "If she was divorced, why should she murder Dutton to get his estate?"

"Because it was the only way she could. If Dutton's death could be properly motivated, with resultant publicity, she could come forward and claim she was his legal heir. Dutton told me that Quigg knew all the details of his first marriage, even to the fact that Dutton was half suspected of killing her by burning down the hotel. Now that happened twenty-three years ago. How would Quigg have found out? I doubt he ever left New York in his life, or had the

cash to take a trip further than Jersey City.

"So Quigg must have been told by someone who knew the complete details of the story. Remember that Dutton and Mary were constantly travelling in those days. They would have had few friends, no one close enough to tell their troubles to. Therefore it probably was Mary who told Quigg.

"Now Dutton, if he had known she was alive, could have divorced her quietly. That meant no money, so he had to die. Without suspicion on anyone for his murder. Marley took care of that.

"Mrs. Marley told me that after the hotel fire she suffered from amnesia, came back to the town some days later and was told the body in the ruins might have been that of a man. Maybe Dutton. And he was told they had definitely established the fact that the body was that of a woman. Now even twenty-three years ago medical science was advanced sufficiently so there could be no mistake in the sex. Someone lied, and it wasn't Dutton. When you encounter one lie, you know there are more."

"But have you any concrete evidence?" Connelly demanded.

"Yes," Bruce said. "In the first place, Dutton acted under a misapprehension. I found evidence that someone had washed blood off his hands in Dutton's bathroom off the study up stairs. I found the remnants of a shirt cuff that probably had been blood-soaked, in the fireplace.

"But that shirt cuff was half buried in ashes away from the rest of the shirt. Why would it have been if the shirt had merely been thrown into the grate and set afire? It never had burned there. Marley burned it somewhere else, carried the ashes here and dumped them into the grate so that the ashes were on top of the unburned shirt cuff. In the chimney I discovered a knife. I told Dutton this, and he confessed to killing Quigg. Shall I tell you why?"

MRS. MARLEY was getting restless, and her eyes flashed angrily.

"If he confessed, why all this nonsense?" she asked.

"I said Dutton acted under a misapprehension," Bruce reminded her coldly. "He thought his step-son had killed Quigg. Why? Because Arthur loves money and luxury. So much that he'd have killed Quigg to stop him from taking steps which might mean Arthur would automatically be out of the picture as Dutton's step-son—and have to go to work. I don't blame Dutton. Arthur is exactly the type.

"But it wasn't Arthur. If he had killed Quigg, he'd have destroyed the evidence that was in the fireplace. He saw me looking at it, yet the ashes are still there, so he must not have known they had any significance. What I believe happened was that Marley did a little successful second-story work, got in the house and planted those clues. He hoped to kill Dutton before Dutton was arrested, but he couldn't get to him. So, after Dutton was released, Marley probably told him he had to pay up or he would tell how Arthur had killed Quigg.

"He ordered Dutton to put on old clothes and meet him at this certain park bench. Dutton went there, and met death."

There was a car horn honking in front. Connelly needed no command. He knew what to do. In a moment he returned, holding onto Sig Marley. Arthur Dutton took one look at him.

"He runs that gambling place—the Cody Club!" he exploded.

"I thought so," Bruce said. "That's why he didn't dare show his face here where you could get a look at him. I think you can take them both away, Sarge. One or the other will talk. If they don't, we have evidence enough anyway. It's the chair for you, Marley. Oh yes—when you want to give the impression that you are a home-loving, peaceful person, don't play solitaire and deal the cards as only a professional gambler does. I watched you at the house."

Dave Bruce went into a bit more detail with Mrs. Dutton after the Marleys were removed. Then he took her arm and led her out of the room.

"Your son, Arthur, and I have something to talk about," he told her.

She smiled nervously. Bruce went back, closed the door and walked over to Arthur Dutton. Without a word he doubled his fist and hit the young man squarely in the stomach.

When he folded, Bruce let him have it on the jaw.

In the hallway, Mrs. Dutton went to the door with the reporter.

"Did you hit him good and hard?" she asked. "Hard enough so he'll perhaps realize what he's been when he wakes up?"

"If I didn't"—Dave Bruce grinned—"send for me and I'll give him another lesson."

"Where is the five grand?" the copper says

They Loved Me in San Merillo

By MORGAN LEWIS

Valeting horses is one thing, a missing corpse another, but being a killer suspect was what bothered Larry most!

I AM DOWN in sunny Florida, placing a few bobs on the bangtails, and this lanky Texan rancher friend of mine is chewing my ear off with offers of a job. Seeing I'm fond of this character, I only give him a cold stare and a frigid glance.

"My good and dear friend," I say to Charlie Rivers, "are you aware of what you're saying? A steady job is not what I fought and bled for in the gloomy Pacific. No, a steady job is not what I desire. But thank you for your kind offer."

Charlie Rivers pulls at his mustache, which is long and white and rolling like a Texas steer's horns.

"Do not take my suggestion too harshly," he says, "after all, the worst that could happen is that you'll go broke. Then, when

you have to go to work, look me up."

"That is very noble of you, but right now I do not need a job," I say hastily. "Besides, the way the army worked me, I will need at least ten years in which to rest up."

This Charlie Rivers owns a stud farm, over in Texas, where he breeds race horses. And while race horses are all very well in their place, I have no yen to play valet to a flock of them.

Also, I am pretty well cushioned at the moment.

"Well," Charlie says, "I am taking my horses back to the farm tonight, and there they will stay for the summer months. If you decide you want to work for a living, come and see me. I am about two miles north of San Merillo, not far from the railroad. And most of my old crew are still in hin hats, occupying Der Fatherland. I am even forced to do my own cooking."

Charlie leaves that night and a couple days later I get a red hot tip, from Sunnyboy Preston, on a nag by the name of Bolero. This Bolero looks like he has been running longer than Norman Thomas but Sunnyboy practically guarantees the tip so I sink the roll. After the race, when I am leaving the track, they are talking of sending out a search party for Bolero, who has not come in yet.

So that is why I leave my box car pullman about two miles north of San Merillo. Arguing with a Jap bullet does not do my leg any good and I get up from a rolling fall considerably the worse for wear. I limp across a field to a highway.

A sign says:

SAN MERILLO TWO MILES.
HOBOS KEEP OUT

The sign points south. This, of course, means nothing to me as I am not a hobo, although just now I may look like one. Box car accommodations along the Gulf are terrible.

About a half mile up the road is a ranch with a white house and the usual collection of outbuildings. I start hoofing it that way. Shortly after there is a great clatter and commotion and an ancient jalopy passes me and screeches to a stop. A big man with a red face climbs out. He has a badge pinned to where his chest was before it slipped down under his belt.

"Don't you see that sign?" he yells, although I am not ten feet away. "I got a good mind to run you in."

THERE is something about this goon that tells me we are not blood brothers. But I am in no condition to mix it with him, not having thrown a lip over food since Donald Duck was an egg.

"You can stop batting your gums," I tell him. "I am on my way to see Charlie Rivers."

"Charlie Rivers' friends don't make a habit of arriving in box cars," he says suspiciously.

"I am eccentric," I say. "If there wasn't something wrong with my head I wouldn't be taking a job valeting Charlie's hayburners."

"Oh," he says, "so you are hitting Charlie Rivers up for a job."

He puts his hands on the blimps that masquerade as his hips and gives me a long, thoughtful stare. It is plain his gray matter is churning at a great rate, but why, I have no idea.

"You have come at the right time," he says finally, and his tone has become surprisingly friendly. "Charlie's last hand just married a rich widow and left him with all those nags to handle by himself. Furthermore, a horse stepped on his foot this morning and he is laid up. When you get there," he says slowly, "go right in. Charlie won't be able to answer the door."

"Why that is terrible," I say. "Poor old Charlie. It is lucky I get here in time."

"It certainly is," says the badge and he goes back to his car. "Remember," he says as he starts off, "don't bother to knock. Just walk right in."

Charlie Rivers must have a pull like a glider cable around here to cause this sudden change in that sourpuss. Fifteen minutes later I turn in the gate at Charlie's and cross a burned-out lawn. The place is as lively as a gas station after midnight.

I go up on the porch and open the door. There is a stairway on the left, going up to the second floor. On the right is a doorway into the living room. Charlie Rivers is sitting there in a big rocker. His chin is resting on his chest. It looks like the poor fellow is taking a nap. I think I will surprise him.

"Hello, Charlie!" I step in and say in a loud voice.

Charlie Rivers does not move. This is funny, so I step over and put my hand on his shoulder. But I do not shake him. On a closer look I see that Charlie Rivers will never speak to anybody again. He is very dead. Somebody has bashed in the back of his head with a club!

For a fast minute the room changes into a green jungle and I am back expecting a Jap sniper to start letting off at me from the fireplace or the big open closet beside it. But there is no movement, and then I am back in the room with Charlie.

I am terribly shocked to see my old friend done in like this. I think of all the beers we hoisted and all the horses we clocked. I feel very sad.

Also I have a great yen to get my hands on the dirty rat that did this. While these and sundry thoughts are passing through my head I discover Charlie's feet. There is nothing remarkable or unusual about them. They are just feet, which makes me wonder. The copper said Charlie was laid up with a bad foot.

I have a sudden hunch and I get down and take off Charlie's shoes. His feet are in as good shape as Fred Astaire's, or maybe better. There was nothing to keep him from hoofing it about! I have a sudden uneasy feeling that rapidly grows no better.

I definitely do not like the idea of this copper giving me a wrong steer. When he tells me Charlie will not answer the door he must have known why. And if he knew Charlie was dead—

Such thoughts cause the clammy hand of fear to play tic-tac-toe down my back. It looks like the copper knows too much about this murder and tries to frame me. If I tell twelve good men and true that I hopped out of a box car and walked in here because Charlie had a bad foot, and found him dead, they will politely laugh up their sleeves and point to the hot seat.

At this stage there is a familiar noise outside. I look out and there is the fat copper, climbing out of his car. This is bad. If what I think is true, this copper might very well put the blast on me, now, to shut my mouth, and then claim he caught me in the act. There is no time to run and no chance to get away. Charlie's ranch is level as a flat-top.

The copper is already coming up to the house. I lay hands on Charlie's rocker and drag it and him across the floor to the big closet beside the fireplace. In the back of my mind is the thought that they can't convict a man of murder unless they produce the body. There is some cordwood stacked at the back of the closet but there is room inside for Charlie, and to spare. I slam the door and lock it.

I would like to swallow the key only it is too big. I pocket it and make the sofa, just as the copper's big feet tramp up onto the porch.

HE BARGES right in without knocking—and pulls up in the living room doorway like a sailboat coming into the wind. He stands there with all sails flapping, staring at the spot where Charlie had been sitting.

My nerves are stretched so tight it is hard not to laugh. Here he is all set to make a pinch, and the evidence is gone. But it is plain this is no time for merriment. Anyone with half an eye can see that this copper knows Charlie has been killed, and I will also lay five to one he had a hand in it.

The copper takes a deep breath.

"Where—" he roars. Then he suddenly remembers he isn't supposed to know Charlie has been rubbed out. He slows down and gives me a long, hard look.

"Where is Charlie?" he asks.

"Why," I say, "Charlie's foot was paining him so he went upstairs to bed."

"Oh, yeah?" the copper says.

He makes a reconnaissance around the room like maybe he will find Charlie curled up under the rug, or laid out on the piano. His blood pressure is going up like a jet-propelled plane. I do not like the way his fingers play with the handle of his big gun. I have a feeling that this big boy is definitely dangerous. He grinds to a two-point landing in front of me, his face as red as a well cooked lobster.

"Now," he says with considerable repressed emotion, "we will go upstairs and find Charlie."

I have been expecting this but, nevertheless, it causes me no little perturbation. Whilst I am casting my eyes about in search of some heavy object with which to argue him out of his stand, the copper suddenly stiffens and the color slides from his face. Somebody is walking about in the house!

There is the distinct sound of heels on wood overhead. Furthermore, they come our way, tapping briskly down the stairs. The copper wheels about and glues his eyes to the doorway, his jaw sagging like the doors of a B-29's bomb-bay. Just as he looks like he will pass out, a little wren appears in the doorway. The copper gives a great sigh and the color comes back into his face.

She is a cute little wren, very pleasing to the eye, with hair this new style red, wrapped up in a snood. She has blue eyes

and a nice straight little nose that, even in this hot weather, is not shiny.

"Good morning," she says sweetly. "Is there something I can do for you? I am Charlie's niece."

The gendarme's look is so heavy with suspicion it practically sags.

"I didn't know Charlie had any relatives," he says.

"I am the only one," she says. "I have been teaching school over in Hollister. Charlie phoned me to come over and help him, now that I am on vacation. I came yesterday."

"I want to see Charlie!" the copper says.

"Well?" the wren says and looks at me.

So does the copper. This is a spot. I feel like the Japs have me enfiladed, but I see nothing to do but to stick to my story.

"I just told him," I say feebly, "that Charlie's foot bothered him and he went up to bed."

"Yes, that is so." The little wren never blinks an eye. "He is taking a nap. Will you leave a message for him?"

This, no doubt, surprises the copper as much as it does me. He is plainly nonplused. His plans are going haywire. Suddenly he gets angry about this run-around and becomes very tough.

"Like the devil I will leave a message," he says. "I will see Charlie myself!" He starts for the stairs.

"I don't think you will," she says firmly. "Uncle does not wish to be disturbed." The little wren never moves.

"We'll see about that," the copper says loudly and makes to push past her.

It is remarkable how her blue eyes suddenly ice up.

"If you are not out of this house in one minute I shall call the State Police," she says coldly and she looks down at her wrist watch.

Personally, I do not think it has a second hand, but the copper gives her the benefit of the doubt. It is plain he wants nothing to do with the troopers.

"Have it your way, lady," he says. "I'm leaving now, but I'll be back."

He goes out. I have a feeling of relief that is practically out of this world.

Charlie's niece sits down on the piano bench like the starch has gone out of her knees. For a minute I think she is going to pieces, but she pulls herself together.

"Well, Larry," she says, "now that he has gone, I will get some lunch and you can scrape some of the alfalfa from your face."

I just goggle at her. How does she know my name? One will get you ten I never lay eyes on her before. This must be two other people. But if she wants to play it this way it is all right by me.

"All right," I say. "I will go up and shave."

SHE nods and gets up and walks out. She is wearing a sweater in such a way as would make the Johnson office ring the curfew on anything that comes off a knitting needle.

Upstairs I find the bathroom and am just breaking out Charlie's shaving set when the phone rings. I had passed an extension in the hall so I go out and pick it up.

"This is Charlie's niece. May I take a message?" the wren is saying.

"Yes," says a businesslike voice. "This is Mr. Barker, president of the San Merillo Bank. You can tell Charlie for me he is forty-seven different kinds of a fool to go running around with ten thousand dollars in his pants. If, as you say, he is laid up, I will be out this afternoon to collect his five thousand dollar note which is due today. I will bring a State Trooper along as guard."

"All right, Horatius," the wren says. "You have held the wire long enough."

She clicks down the receiver.

I hang up and go back to my shaving. It is easy enough to see why Charlie was rubbed out. Ten G's ain't hay. I feel like I am in the middle of a three-way draw. Did the girl kill Charlie or did the copper, or are they in on it together? It is hard to believe that a cute little trick like Charlie's niece could have wielded a murder club. Also she wouldn't have backed my play with the copper if she was trying to hang it on me.

Well, I think, it will all come out this afternoon and maybe I will wind up in the clink. It is well known to one and all that these state troopers are pretty tough and very thorough. My stomach becomes full of butterflies thinking of the questions this trooper guard will ask.

I finish up and go downstairs. These thoughts would ruin my appetite if I was not hungry enough to eat a horse and chase the jockey. The table is set in the kitchen and I sit down at once as the sight of food almost overcomes me. The wren parks on the other side.

"You look almost human without the chin

whiskers, Larry," she remarks.

I do not reply, being busy filling the empty spaces with ham and eggs. This dame wields a very wicked skillet. Having her call me by name like this and acting like we are old friends gives me a feeling of goose bumps. It is plain she is handing me the old razzle-dazzle. I think, I will try some of this razzle-dazzle stuff myself.

"Will you give me some coffee, Priscilla?" I say.

"Why, of course," she says without batting an eye.

I give up the dice. If she wasn't pulling a game on me she would have squawked because, for all I know, her name may be Mary or Elizabeth or even Peggy. A great confusion settles upon me—but I finish eating.

I lean back and let out my belt.

"I suppose now you will go out and look after the live stock?" Priscilla says.

"Most certainly," I say blithely, like it is the most natural thing in the world. As I am heading for the stables I look back and see her wiping her eyes by the ice box. The sight of this grief gives me a most unaccountable feeling in the left side of my chest. Apparently she set great store by her Uncle Charlie.

Charlie has a very nice layout indeed. Young stock are kicking up their heels in a paddock and taking the sun on their backs. In the stable are a number of brood mares and a couple of stallions. There are a few empty, uncleaned stalls. It is as plain as the nose on your face that Charlie sold some horses to get that ten grand.

I give them their oats and go up into the loft for some hay. I throw down a goodly amount and am about to descend when there is a loud explosion and something cracks sharply against my head. I feel myself falling through the hay chute—and that is all I know.

WHEN next I opened my eyes I am lying on the stable floor and my head is resting on something very soft and warm. I discover it is Priscilla's lap.

"What happened?" I ask groggily.

"Somebody took a shot at you," she says, "and if it had been an inch farther to the right, you would not be able to ask questions. I heard the noise and ran out. I guess whoever did it has gotten away."

I do not feel so good when I learn that somebody is around taking pot shots at me. People have died of lead poisoning. They sure loved me here in San Merillo!

Priscilla helps me up, and, although I am pretty shaky, I manage to make the house by leaning on her, which is very pleasant. I make the couch in the living room and she puts a bandage around my head. She sits beside me and her blue eyes look very sad.

"Now," she says softly, "what happened to my uncle?"

"He was killed," I tell her, figuring the time has come to be honest.

"Yes," she says, "I know that, but where is he now?"

I point to the closet and reach in my pocket and give her the key. She looks at it thoughtfully and puts it in her pocket.

"Very well," she says. "You stay here and rest. I have some work to do."

I am very glad to see her leave the room as when I fish the key from my pocket I also feel something else in there. Now I knew, sadly enough, that pocket was empty, so naturally I am all eagered up to find out what has gotten into it. I reach in and pull out something. It is money and I smooth it out. It is two G notes!

This is too much. My head feels like a concrete-mixer and my stomach begins to act up. I stagger out onto the lawn and find a bench. Either Priscilla, or the one who shot me, could have put the folding money in my jeans. Priscilla might have done both—not that I think she did, but you have to figure all the angles.

Some time later, whilst I am still trying to figure this thing, a car stops out front and a state trooper and an old chap, in a gray business suit, get out. They head for the house and I guess the old guy is Barker the banker.

The trooper looks at my bandaged head and his eyes narrow a little.

"I was kicked by a horse," I explain hastily. "I am Larry Lightner. I am working for Charlie Rivers."

The trooper nods and I go up to the house with them, thinking it is better to walk there now than be dragged up later.

Priscilla meets us in the living room.

"Hello, Mr. Barker," she says. "I am Charlie's niece."

"Strange I never saw you before," the banker remarks.

"Oh, no," Priscilla says quickly. "I live over beyond San Merillo. I just came here yesterday."

The banker nods like it doesn't make much difference one way or the other. His eyes have been casing the room all this time like something puzzles him.

"Where's Charlie?" he asks.

Priscilla looks at me and I look at her, waiting for her to put the finger on me. Barker is watching us with the cold look in his eyes found only in artificial ones or in bankers.

"Well?" he says irritably and just then his eyes fall on the throw rug where Charlie's chair used to be. "I know what is wrong," he says. "Charlie's chair is missing!"

Suddenly the trooper lets out a grunt and goes down on his knees like a bloodhound after Eliza. He rubs his hand on this throw rug and when he holds it up it has got red on it.

"What's this?" says Barker, leaning forward. "Blood?"

"It ain't ketchup," the trooper says, and looks at me with cold suspicion.

"Maybe it came from my head," I say weakly.

"And maybe it didn't!" the trooper says. "Things don't seem right around here. Where is Mr. Rivers?"

"Where is Charlie's chair?" asks Barker.

"Maybe I can find out," the trooper says slowly. He is staring at the black lines made by the chair when I dragged it across the yellow maple floor. Those lines lead straight to the closet.

"Locked," the trooper says, "and I suppose there is no sense in asking for the key."

He pulls out a skeleton key and Barker moves over beside him. When the door swings open they both look in and I think, here is the payoff.

"Empty as a taxpayer's pocket," the trooper says.

I cannot believe my ears and think they must be nearsighted or joking. But when they move away I see they are right. The closet is empty. I am wondering if maybe Houdini has come back to life.

"Mr. Barker, if you and the trooper will come outside I believe I can explain things," Priscilla says.

"Ah," the trooper says, "I knew there was dirty work." And he gives me a glance of suspicion, like he thinks I am the perpetrator.

Mr. Barker looks sharply at Priscilla.

"Very well, there is an air of mystery around here. Perhaps you can clear it up."

They go out and I sit on the couch and hate the trooper. I do not like the snug way his uniform fits, nor the way his hair curls. Furthermore, I do not like the wolf-gleam in his eye when he looks at Priscilla. Presently he will come back and lug me off to the clink. I cannot remember if they use the chair or a rope in Texas, but I understand both are effective.

WHILST I am shaking hands with the glooms, I hear a noise downstairs, like someone moving stealthily about in the cellar. Outside, I can see Barker and the trooper talking to Priscilla, so it cannot be them. I am already well behind the eight ball so I decide I will hoof it below and see what gives.

I slip off my shoes, grab the poker from the fireplace and head for the kitchen. Out there is a door that opens on the cellar steps. I go down quietly, walking on my toes. The light is not good in the cellar and at first I do not see so well. Then I make out a shape at the other end. It moves and I see it is the big copper. He is bending over something.

That something is Charlie, still in his rocker. How he got there is the sixty-four dollar question. The copper is going through Charlie's pockets.

At that moment I inadvertently stub my toe against a pile of cordwood. The copper swings around, pulling out his Roscoe.

"Oh," he says. "You are the very man I wanted to see. Where is the five grand?"

"I thought Charlie had ten grand," I say, surprised no little.

"That is true," says the copper, "but I only got five. There is five missing. Come across with it!"

A board creaks over my head but the copper is too busy sounding off to notice. Apparently he does not know that the banker and the trooper have arrived.

"I suppose," I say, "that you took the five grand when you put the slug on Charlie?"

"You are a bright lad," the copper says. "But this information will do you no good, as I am about to put you where the dogs won't bite you. Tell me where the five grand is and I will give it to you in the head, instead of where it hurts like the devil."

"I have not got the five grand," I say. "I have only got two."

"I know that," the copper says, "because I put them there. I would certainly have finished you off in the barn if the tomato had

not come out so quick."

When the copper speaks of Priscilla in that manner I become exceedingly angry. In fact, I burn up. I heave the poker at him, which is a great piece of foolishness.

He lets off with his Roscoe, but misses as he is dodging the poker. I dive for a foxhole behind the wood pile and shy a few sticks at him, hoping to dent his ugly puss. The bozo hops about like a jumping jack, letting go with his equalizer. Bullets pass me, screaming threats, and knocking large splinters from the cordwood. This can not go on for long. It doesn't.

Just as I am getting ready to shake hands with Saint Peter, a large section of the ceiling comes down on the copper, knocking him flat. And what spills off this piece of ceiling is the trooper, the banker and the babe.

Priscilla runs over to me and cuts up quite a fuss until I tell her I am not hurt. It seems that the closet where I put Charlie is nothing but a big dumbwaiter that Charlie used, to get his firewood upstairs. When Priscilla and the two men got in there to listen to the copper, the weight was too much and the platform came down in a hurry.

The trooper pushes it up, but the copper is finished. His neck is broken like a Hitler treaty. The trooper lifts his wallet, and there is three grand.

Of course, I am in the clear when Priscilla explains things. Yesterday she came out to help Charlie after his cook quit. This morning she goes to town for groceries. When she gets back she finds Charlie dead in the living room. Somebody had come in during her absence and put the slug on him.

Suspecting robbery, she goes through his pockets and finds five grand. His wallet with the other five grand is missing. Whilst she is upstairs concealing the money under her mattress, I come in. She decides to keep quiet and see if I am mixed up in the killing as she is very fond of Charlie and is determined to bring the guilty party to justice.

When the copper barges in and is so insistent about seeing Charlie she becomes suspicious of him. Later, when I am shot in the barn, she decides he is the guilty party.

Charlie had mentioned that the copper was present when he closed the deal for his horses down in San Merillo, so the fat gendarme would know that Charlie was carrying ten grand in his pants. By now, she figured he would have discovered he had only got five grand. She sets a trap for him.

She phones him that she has discovered Charlie down cellar with his head bashed in. She says for him to come in the back way as she suspects me of being the murderer. Then she lowers Charlie on the platform and wheels him off down cellar.

KNOWING that the copper will be practically drooling at the mouth to lay hands on the other five grand, she expects to pop in with the trooper and catch him in the act of frisking Charlie. Of course, I somewhat gum the works by going down after him.

"A great piece of detective work," the banker says to Priscilla. "If we ever have any trouble at the bank I will call you in."

The trooper makes a phone call and presently they come and take away Charlie and the copper.

During all this I have been developing a great admiration for this little wren. It seems to me she is the answer to what every man should have. But, of course, it is too much to hope that on such short acquaintance she should feel likewise.

"Well, now that things are cleaned up, I had better be moving along," I say.

"What!" she says, "and leave me alone with all these horses?"

The way she says it, at the same time looking down helplessly at her hands, gives me a very warm feeling indeed.

"Very well," I tell her, "I will stay, but we will have to get some respectable woman in as it would not be proper for us to stay here alone."

"That will be easy," she says, giving me the full voltage of her eyes. "The mother of one of my pupils works out and she will be glad to earn a few dollars."

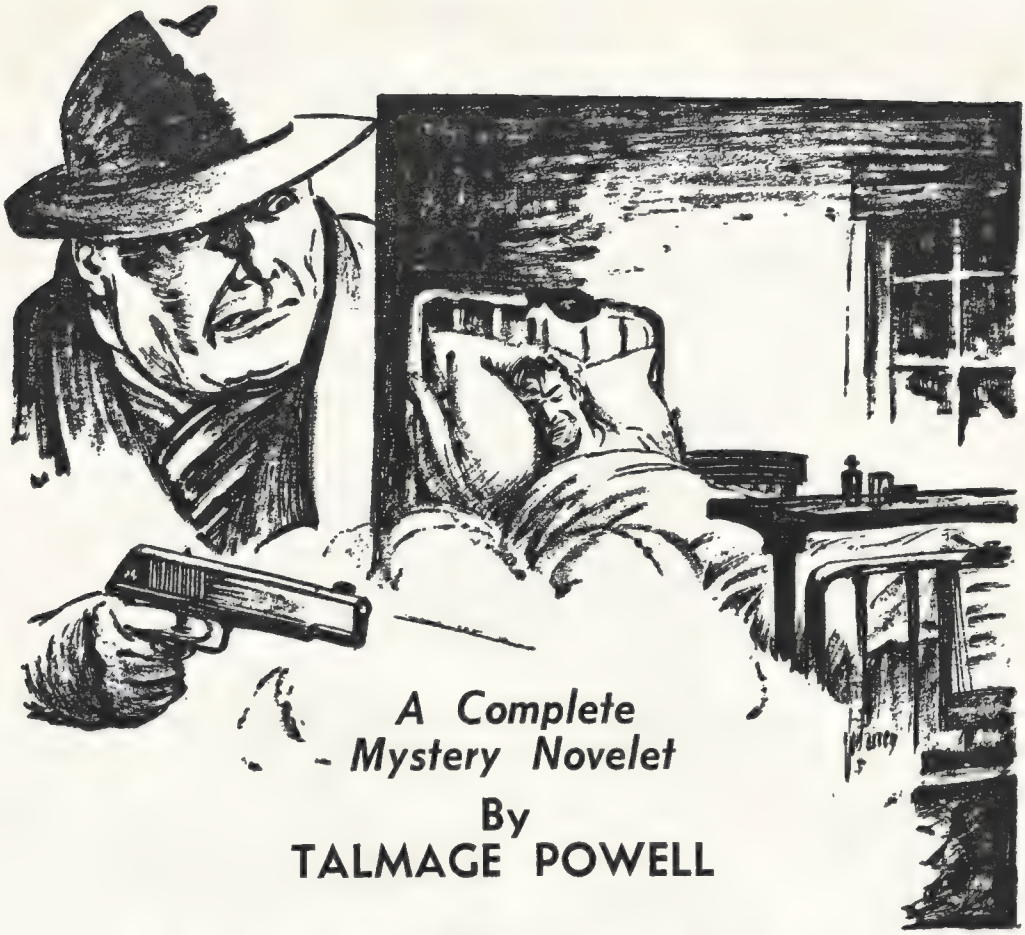
Well, that is settled, and something tells me this worthy woman will not have to be separated from her family for too long. But other things have been bothering me.

"How did you know my name was Larry?" I ask.

"Uncle Charley told me," she says. "He knew you would be along. Uncle Charlie told Sunnyboy Preston to give you that hot tip on Bolero."

This is not so surprising as Charlie Rivers was a very devious man and one set on having his own way. But there is one thing more that puzzles me. "How's about telling me your real name?" I ask.

"Silly," she says. "You know it. It is Priscilla."



A Complete Mystery Novelet

By
TALMAGE POWELL

BLOOD ON HER

CHAPTER I

"I Wanted to Kill You!"

RAIN had come with darkness. Now, at nine o'clock, Jared Avenue was slick black asphalt devoid of life or light save for an occasional passing car and the blob of yellow that spilled from a bar halfway down the block, and the light on the corner.

A tall, thin man, hatless and in shirtsleeves, his hair plastered to his head by the cold rain, came in a staggering run out of the shadows. He stood swaying drunkenly under the corner street light. His rasping breath mingled with the patter of raindrops. His body was twisted, bent. His hands clutched his stomach. Blood dripped through his fingers, splashing on the dark rivulets of water at his feet.

He turned, his eyes searching the darkness behind him. This was a neighborhood of cheap rooming houses, and in an unkempt yard the thin man saw a flicker of movement. He sobbed.

Tires made a sucking sound in the night as a car turned the corner. "Help me!" the thin man yelled hoarsely, almost incoherently. "He's murdering me!"

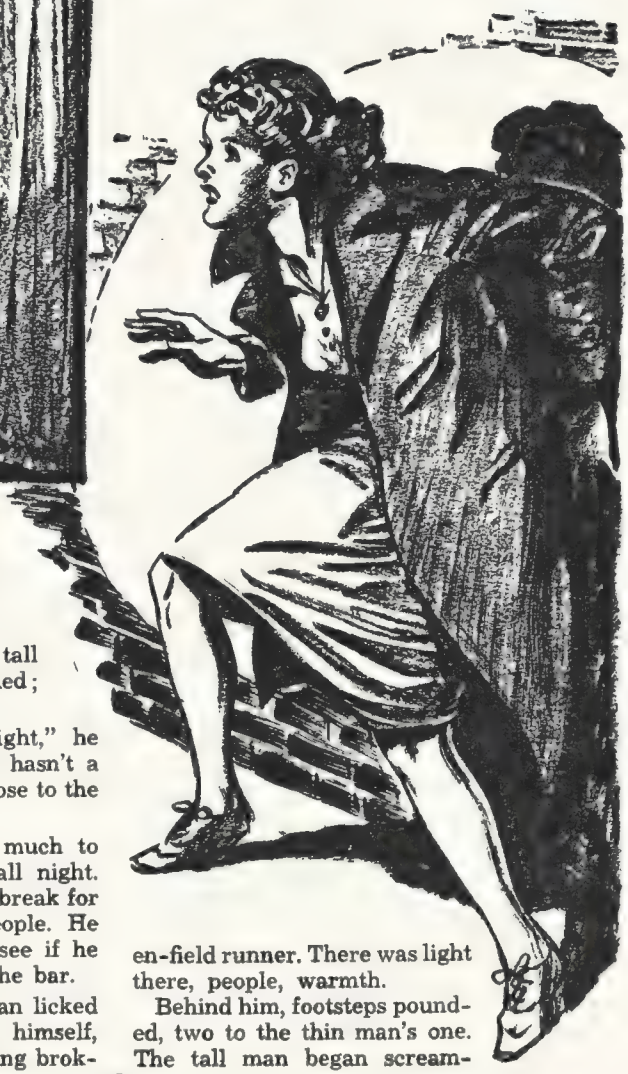
The car slowed, a creature of hesitation.

"Put it to bed, you lush!" a voice said.

The car shot ahead. Blood dripped through the thin man's fingers. He cursed chokingly.

Paula Sloan had plenty of reason for killing her patient, and when he suddenly died things looked pretty bad for her!

Paula threw up her arms to shield her head, but the blow crashed through her guard



HANDS

The drifting shadow behind the tall man came closer. The tall man watched; his mouth worked.

"As long as I'm here in the light," he thought, "he won't bother me. He hasn't a gun, only a knife. He won't come close to the light."

The tall man was bleeding too much to stand in the shelter of the light all night. Sometime he would have to make a break for the bar ahead, where there were people. He was weak. It would be a race to see if he could beat the drifting shadow to the bar.

Seconds ticked away. The tall man licked his lips. Abruptly, he gathered himself, plunged toward the bar like a twisting broken-field runner. There was light there, people, warmth.

Behind him, footsteps pounded, two to the thin man's one. The tall man began scream-

ing without pause. The thudding feet behind him pounded in his head, filled his skull. Nearer and nearer. He was halfway to the bar when he stumbled, fell.

Still screaming, he crawled forward, the footsteps behind him rushing upon him. Then the thunder of the footsteps stopped, retreated softly. Voices came to the tall man on the ground.

"I ain't had that many drinks, Joe. I tell you I heard a guy screaming. Like bloody murder."

Three men hesitated in the doorway of the bar, scanning the street.

"There he is is!" one of them cried, and they tumbled out of the bar.

One of them knelt over the tall man. Hands turned the thin man and rain beat in his face. Distantly, he heard a startled gasp:

"Look at his stomach! It's slashed open!"

"Yeah," another voice quavered, as the man who spoke became suddenly sick, "he couldn't have done a better job if he'd been trying to commit hara-kiri. . . ."

IN THE white corridor of the hospital, the mutter of rain outside was distant, lulling. Paula Sloan neared the stairwell, her white nurse's uniform rustling softly. She almost bumped into a large man with a heavy face and glistening bald head who stepped out of the stairwell.

"Excuse me, Doctor Broughton," she said.

Dr. Carl Broughton, looking like an English country gentleman in rough tweeds, stepped aside.

"You're excused, my dear." He smiled, and added, "Your young doctor performed a miracle of surgery tonight, you know."

"I didn't know. I just came on duty." She smiled also. "My doctor?"

His eyes were searching. "Isn't that the way you feel about Doctor Scott?"

She said nothing. He moved his great bulk closer.

"I know that isn't a thing a doctor should say, Paula," he said softly. "But I have said it, and I'm not sorry."

"Please, Doctor!"

His eyes clouded. "Must it always be 'Doctor'?" he asked. "You must know how I feel about you, Paula."

"I'm sorry, but I—"

He forced a laugh that boomed in the corridor.

"Larry Scott—he's a very lucky man," he said. "I would give you anything, my dear, but Larry Scott— Suppose we just say that I am not the sort of man to impress the ladies. My ugly face, my bald head, are naturally not impressive."

"You've always impressed me, Doctor," Paula said.

"As a doctor, yes." He laid his hand gently on her shoulder. "I'm an old fool, I suppose. Don't let the things I've said make you feel badly."

She relaxed as footsteps approached. Then they saw Dr. James Craddock.

"That was a fine piece of work you and Larry Scott did in surgery tonight, Jim," Broughton said.

Craddock nodded a perfunctory greeting to Paula and Dr. Broughton. He was a tall man, slightly stooped. On his long, sharply-featured face spread a wry smile.

"You'll have to give Larry credit for that," he said. "I only assisted him. But it was a pleasure, watching him put the fellow on the operating table back in one piece. I think I'd have bobbled that job."

"It sounds serious," Paula said. "What was the operation?"

Carl Broughton nodded.

"It was serious," he assured. "They brought a man in with his stomach slashed open. Three men in a bar on Jared Avenue heard screams, found the man unconscious on the sidewalk. As soon as they got him to the hospital Larry and Jim went right to work on him. They've brought the man down now. I suspect, my dear, that Doctor Scott will want you to attend his patient tonight."

"The superintendent asked me to see Larry," Paula said. "Who is the patient?"

Dr. Craddock ran long, lean fingers through his sandy hair.

"Some cheap gunman. He's down in Four-o-three. I think you'll find Scott there. Our patient is still under ether, Paula, but drop in on him often tonight. Larry and I did a lot of hard work on the fellow."

"I will," Paula promised, and moved away from them.

She felt Dr. Broughton's eyes, hurt and patient, on her. The big, jolly-faced man had been kind to her, carrying his heart in his hands. She valued his friendship, but some men, Paula thought, are not satisfied with friendship alone. She went softly down the corridor on her rubber-soled shoes.

Paula opened the door of Room 403. A slim man was bending over the narrow, white bed. He turned, his white smock rustling.

His lean, rather long face flashed in a smile as Paula closed the door and came toward him. Laughter crinkles almost buried his warm, brown eyes.

"Hello, darling." He gripped her arms, his lips brushing hers.

"I'm on duty, Doctor," she reminded primly.

"Then I'll have to see you at breakfast," he told her.

"Should you, Larry? It's late. You won't get much sleep."

"How can I sleep anyway?" he asked. "Thinking of a slim nurse with golden lights in her eyes and hair?"

"Your words are wonderful, Doctor," she laughed. "But I'm still on duty."

He dropped his hands to his sides in mock hopelessness. He still stood faintly crooked, from the shrapnel wound he had received not many months before when a shell had played hob with the receiving station where he had been stationed in France. His color was not yet as good as it once had been, and his face was a trifle too lean, his jaw too sharp.

Yesterday, he had said to Paula:

"What I need is a woman's good cooking for a while."

Now she turned from him, a catch in her throat. Larry had been through a lot over there, but she still couldn't convince herself that it would be fair for her to saddle him, a rising but still financially insecure young doctor, with her aged, invalid mother.

LARRY was saying something about the patient's chart. But Paula didn't hear, for her eyes had fallen full on the man on the narrow bed. His face was white, his eyes closed, but she would have known him anywhere. Lou Blane! Who had caused her more anguish than anyone else in the world. And Lou Blane had not changed one iota since she had seen him last, which was five years ago.

The room suddenly became unreal. Old, bitter memories stirred like licking flames in Paula's mind. Paula Sloan had considered murder once in her life, had considered killing this man in a mad moment of deep hurt five years ago, when everything that was right in her had cried out for justice.

The moment of madness had passed, though, and she had forced herself to forget. Now, five years later, Lou Blane, the man she had vainly tried to make herself murder, was lying, ether-drugged, in a hospital bed under her hands.

Larry's voice came to her as out of a void.

"Paula! You're trembling."

She forced herself to meet his gaze.

"If you're not feeling well," he said quickly, "I can have another nurse assigned."

"I'm all right," she assured him.

The frown left his clean brow slowly.

"Sure, you're okay. It's just my nerves. Everything's been magnified since I came back. Don't forget breakfast."

"I won't, Larry."

She watched him leave the room. She waited a moment, then turned and looked again at Lou Blane, at his narrow rat face.

The years rolled back in Paula Sloan's mind. She was remembering Sis. Sis had been young, too young to have suffered as she had. Sis had had her values all mixed up. Paula thought of the night Sis had faced her defiantly, a half-packed suitcase on the bed. "I'm going away, Paula!" she had said. "It'll be a lot better if you don't try to stop me!"

"You don't know what you're doing, Sis!" Paula had pleaded. "You're too young to know. You think flashy dresses and a fur coat are the best things in life. Parties and cars don't make up life, either."

"They're a lot more than I'll ever get around here!" Sis had declared.

"No, Sis." Paula had taken a hard breath. "I know who you've been seeing these last few nights. Lou Blane is no good, Sis. I haven't been asleep every night you've crept in at three or four in the morning."

Sis had crammed a dress in her bag.

"Always spying! That's one thing I want to get away from. You and Mom with your old-fashioned ideas. I'm going, and you can't stop me. Lou Blane may not be your idea of a man, but he can give me the things I want. He loves me—he told me so."

The door had slammed behind Sis. Paula had stood unmoving, the pathetic words echoing in her ears— "He loves me—he told me so."

"You poor, foolish Sis!" Paula had whispered. "Men like Lou Blane never love anybody."

The house had been very silent. Sis was gone.

The next piece of the mad montage had come months later. The day had been sunny. Spring was in the air. It was not a day for dying. Yet a group of people, silent and

shuffling awkwardly, were knotted about the broken body of the young girl lying on the sidewalk below the rotting brick wall of the Victor Hotel. Sis had jumped from the sixth floor.

Paula Sloan had thought of murder then. Each clod of earth falling into Sis's grave had whispered to her to kill, but she hadn't, and grass had grown green and thick over the mound of earth.

Stiffly, Paula turned again to look at Lou Blane. He was so still, so unresisting in the narrow hospital bed. One rightly placed blow, hard and swift, and all the meticulous work Dr. Larry Scott had done would be undone.

Paula sat down, buried her face in her hands. She was dedicated to cure, not to kill. And Sis had been dead a long time.

CHAPTER II

Shroud of Darkness

A LAUGH from the doorway jerked Paula's head up.

"Did he turn out to be a wolf in doctor's clothing?" Miss Raynes asked.

Miss Raynes was on the switchboard here on the fourth floor. Her white uniform made her look almost plump. She was a blonde who had been called down by Miss Hastings, the superintendent, for chewing gum on duty and sneaking long phone calls with boy friends.

"What do you want?" Paula asked.

"Somebody to see you, downstairs in the reception room." Miss Raynes' wide blue eyes rolled. "I think it's a gent. You look a little white about the edges, honey. Now if this gent downstairs," she suggested. "Well, mayme if you made Larry Scott jealous, it'd wake him up."

Paula forced a wry smile.

"The old technique."

"Sure thing." Miss Raynes fell in step beside her as they started down the corridor.

The heavy man in the waiting room just inside the huge front doors of the hospital laid aside a magazine and rose from a leather chair as Paula entered. There was no one else in the room.

The heavy man didn't speak. Paula flinched under his gaze. She had a feeling that his hard, black eyes were photographing her, detail by detail, so that he would know her, even in the dark. It tightened her throat. She had never seen the man before. There was no reason he should be filing every detail of her features in his mind, through the medium of those flicking black eyes.

"You wished to see me?" she asked.

He stepped closer, his eyes drilling into her, looming in her vision.

"You're Paula Sloan?"

She nodded.

There was a silence. Not a muscle in his face worked; only his eyes.

"I'm sorry I put you to the trouble of running down here for nothing," he said finally.

"But I don't understand," she said.

He stopped beneath the arched doorway, his searching eyes on her once more.

"You're the wrong Paula Sloan," he said. "I was looking for someone else." His expression made his words mocking. She knew he was lying.

He pulled open one of the metal and glass doors. Gusty rain lanced in from outside. The door closed behind him. Paula watched him turn up his trench-coat collar. He looked at her once more through the glass door, his eyes laughing without mirth. Then he turned and went down the wide stone steps that led to the sidewalk.

Paula stifled an urge to run after him, demand his reason for being here. But she knew he would make her look silly, shrug her words aside with a hard laugh.

"Maybe," she thought, "I'm imagining things, after the shock of seeing Lou Blane and all. Maybe the man was really looking for another Paula Sloan."

But she couldn't forget the way the heavy man had fixed her image on his mind with his eyes. Her forehead was hot, but the thin clamminess on it was like ice.

By the time she rode the self-service elevator back to the fourth floor, Paula was wishing she was off duty tonight. A cup of hot coffee with Larry, his voice filling a room —that was what she wanted. From the moment she had seen Lou Blane lying in the white bed, the hospital had become a different place, growing cold, strange.

She slipped inside Room 403, closed the door. She checked Lou Blane's pulse. It was strong enough, steady and even. As she raised her eyes from her watch, she saw his lips move, his mouth twitch. The barely-breathed sounds that came from his mouth were at first an incoherent jumble. Then they strengthened, and she heard: "Vi—Violet

knows. Violet knows!"

She knew he was dreaming under ether. Then she stiffened. Was Lou Blane reliving the nightmare he had experienced a few short hours ago? Had some Violet been a witness to the attempted murder of Blane?

Paula stood stock-still, watching Lou Blane's lips. Then she heard the faint whisper of sound behind her. She whirled, her heart smothering her as she glimpsed the heavy shadow on the far wall. The bed screen had been pushed over in the corner, making an excellent hiding place.

She sensed the blow falling, threw up her arms to shield her head. The blow crashed through her guarding wrists. A gun barrel splashed fire over her vision. She never knew when she crumpled to the floor. . . .

Vaguely Paula realized that she was struggling out of a bad dream. She forced open her eyes, looked around. The room was the same dimly-lighted place. Rain continued to patter outside the black square of window. But now the patter was louder, mingling with the throbbing in Paula's head.

She got to her feet, giddy. The window was open, and a few fine raindrops had found their way in on her face, bringing her back to her senses. Her glance wavered to the watch on her wrist. She had been unconscious a little over five minutes.

SHE looked at the bed—and strangled a scream with the back of her hand. She had been right—one quick, hard blow and all Dr. Larry Scott's careful surgery on Lou Blane was as nothing!

She turned her face away. She had seen death many times, but not like this, a man twisted in a bed gory with his blood. She fought for control, staggered to the bed, pulled the sheet, which had been ripped away, up about Lou Blane's chin, hiding the blood.

She stumbled to the window. In a little while the cool air cleared her head. Her mind began to function.

The drop below the window was sheer—a fifty-foot drop. It would have been hard for the killer to have gone out there, but the only other way out of this room was through the door and down the corridor leading through the depths of the hospital.

She clenched her hands, fought for control. She listened for some outcry in the hospital. There was none. What would she tell them? That a shadow had struck her down, murdered Lou Blane and vanished from a window fifty feet above black, wet, glistening asphalt?

Knuckles rapped softly on the door. It was like an electric shock. She was suddenly marooned in an alien world, alone with a dead man, strength seeming to leave her knees.

She forced herself to the door, opened it a crack. A strange face met her gaze—the rocky, flat face of a barrel-like man. The man held up his palm. A bit of metal gleamed there. It was a policeman's badge.

A feeling of cold caution swept over Paula.

"Yes?" she asked easily.

"We're checking Lou Blane, lady."

"Homicide?" The word slipped out.

The cop looked at her queerly.

"No, lady. Not Homicide. I wanted to question Lou Blane. The rat deserved whatever he got, but I'm supposed to find out who cut him."

"He—he's still under ether," she said.

Would this policeman believe the wild story of the murdering shadow? She knew it wouldn't take the police long to find out about Sis and Lou Blane, five years back. They would say that she, Paula Sloan, hadn't been able to pass the opportunity tonight of revenging Sis.

They would laugh off the shadow tale, claim that she had been alone in the hospital room with Lou Blane. That would be so much simpler, less messy. Why chase a shadow when there was the sure-fire conviction of Paula Sloan to work on?

"The superintendent told me Blane was still asleep," the cop said. "But she said I was to come on up, if I wanted to." He shrugged his beefy shoulders under his slick raincoat. "It's a rotten night. I'll hang around awhile. Maybe Blane will wake up." He started to shoulder his way in.

"But Mr. Blane has had a serious operation," Paula said. "You'd better ask his doctor if you can come in."

"I phoned Doc Scott," the cop said, watching her narrowly. "He said I could question Blane if I didn't get him excited. I'll hang around."

He strolled into the room. Paula struggled to keep her breathing even as she closed the door.

The cop looked down at Lou Blane.

"He looks pretty peaked."

"Yes," she said, "pretty peaked."

Now there were three of them in the room.

Paula Sloan, a crime she had wanted to commit five years ago, and retribution in the blocky form of the bluecoat. And only the thin layers of bed linens hiding Lou Blane's blood from the man's roving eyes.

She went weak as a new thought struck her. Would the blood that had not coagulated seep to the surface of the sheet, a widening crimson stain coming into being before the eyes of the policeman?

She walked toward the bed.

"Do you have any idea of who cut Blane?"

The cop shook his head.

"Blane lived at a Mrs. Flaherty's rooming house at Four-thirty-three Jared Avenue. Mrs. Flaherty is old, not able to do much work, and has chased off most of her roomers and closed most of her house up. There was only her and an old geezer on the top floor in the house tonight, besides Blane and whoever was mad at him. Mrs. Flaherty didn't hear nothing and the old geezer was sleeping off his gin."

Paula looked from the policeman to the bed. There was a spot of blood at the edge of the sheet, the size of a dime. Her pulse hammered in her throat, but she put a smile on her stiff lips.

"Why don't you take the chair there?" she invited.

He sighed.

"Thanks, lady. My feet are hurting, at that."

She moved slowly along the bed, inching toward the blood spot.

"Have you decided how Mr. Blane was attacked?" she asked, as she caught the cop's eyes. "Don't you usually reconstruct crimes like this?"

"Yeah."

HE FISHED through his pockets, hunting cigarettes. Paula's fingers trailed along the edge of the bed. The spot of blood was only inches away.

"The way I put it together is like this," the policeman said. "Lou Blane had a visitor in his room. Him and the visitor got to arguing. The visitor grabbed a hunting knife Lou had laying on the dresser—we found the knife case. The visitor whacked Blane across the stomach. Maybe Blane hit him back, stunned the guy.

"Blind with pain, Blane managed to get out of the house. He made it to the corner. Maybe the visitor was hot on his heels. I guess Blane had been hurting so bad he hadn't thought of yelling until he got to the corner. He started yelling then. Some guys in a bar heard him, found him on the sidewalk. Of course they didn't have no idea someone was right behind Blane, and when the knifer saw the men coming out of the bar he faded into an alley and got away. Nobody seen him."

With a grunt, the cop found cigarettes. He scraped a match, drew it toward his mouth. He applied the match to the cigarette, eyes on his hands. Paula's fingers flicked the edge of the sheet over the blood spot.

She moved away from the bed. Covering the spot of blood had been a task that left her wanting to crumple to the floor and rest. She was aware of the police officer's hard, suddenly questioning gaze on her face. Maybe he was reading it all in her eyes, in the set of her white lips. Any moment now he would be looking back at Lou Blane. It wouldn't take him all night to catch on to the fact that Blane was not breathing.

"Make yourself comfortable," she said to him. "I have to step down to the dispensary for a moment."

She turned, started from the room, each step a mile long. She closed the door behind her, turned down the corridor.

CHAPTER III

Escape

PAULA had no plan, no real hope, only the driving desire to get away from the thin sheet that hid the secret of Lou Blane's murder. Any moment the policeman in that room might pull the sheet back.

After that, they would question her under a bright light, never giving her pause or rest until she was broken, disheveled, saying anything. Saying that she had killed Lou Blane for what he had done to her sister five years ago. She could imagine a stenographer writing it all down, could almost see the pen thrust in her shaking hand to sign it. The confession would be delivered and the district attorney would nod, satisfied.

A low whimper escaped her lips. "Miss Sloan!" a voice said.

She whirled, trying to compose her features.

Dr. James Craddock was coming down the

corridor behind her. His long, sharp face wore a frown.

"Are you ill?" he asked.

"Ill? Why, no. I—I was just humming under my breath."

He paused beside her.

"Silly of me. I thought I heard you sob. How is the patient?"

"Still sleeping," she said.

"He'll be under ether for some time yet, I guess," Dr. Craddock said. "Larry asked me to look in on him before I went home. I was just going down to his room."

"No!"

"What, Miss Sloan?"

"I mean, I— He's resting all right, Doctor Craddock. Excuse me, please."

She started on down the corridor. She listened for his footsteps, heard nothing. That meant he was still standing there staring after her.

"If he calls me," she thought, "I'll pretend I don't hear. I've got to get out of here!"

She went around the turn in the corridor, neared the door with the small light over it that indicated the stairs. A heavy bellow suddenly filled the corridor behind her. A door slammed. The acid voice of Miss Larson, head nurse on this floor, rose.

"See here, sir!" she was saying. "This is a hospital. You can't shout like that here."

"Where's that nurse?" the cop Paula had just left shouted. "Lou Blane ain't never going to wake up! Get that nurse!"

Paula tore down the stairs. Two factors, she thought desperately, were in her favor—the policeman's being unfamiliar with the layout of the hospital would cause him to hesitate, and Miss Larson and Dr. Craddock would run first to Lou Blane's room.

Paula reached the ground floor, slammed shut the stairs doorway, cutting off the pounding of the officer's feet somewhere above her. In short moments, she knew, the hospital would hum. Every doctor and nurse would have their eyes peeled for her. A swift phone call to Headquarters and squad cars would surround the place.

The nurse on duty at the switchboard here on the main floor evidently was in the process of getting a call from Miss Larson on the fourth floor. Her face was white. She glimpsed Paula.

"Paula!" she shrilled. "Paula Sloan! She's running out the back, Miss Larson!"

Paula almost bowled over a young intern as she raced toward the double doors at the end of the corridor. He shouted something as she jerked the doors open.

The night was thick, black, wet. Shivering, she ran down the short flight of stone steps. Behind her in the hospital she heard rising voices.

Here was the parking grounds, a dark plateau, with no place of concealment. In her white uniform, she would be plainly seen against the black of the night.

The rain stabbed icy needles in her face as she ran. Across the broad expanse of parking lot were shrubs, bushes, if she could reach them. The shouting voice of the young intern she had passed cut her thoughts off.

"That way! She ran that way!"

Paula dropped low, sprang between two cars parked at her left. At the edge of the parking lot the policeman's flashlight fingered the night. In seconds he would be abreast of Paula, playing his light over the cars.

Teeth chattering, she tried the door at her right. It was locked. The policeman's footsteps crunched on wet gravel, nearing.

Paula closed her fingers over the handle of the door at her left. It opened with a faint creak that shrilled in her ears. Crouched like a shivering, trapped animal, she eased the door wide enough to slip in.

Her hand groped, touched the seat. She felt a man's leg. She jerked her fingers back as though she had touched a hot piece of metal.

"It's quite all right, my dear," Dr. Carl Broughton said softly. "Get in the car. I was just getting ready to drive away."

DR. BROUGHTON touched her cold hand.

"You'd better hurry, Paula," he whispered. "I can hear the gentleman yelling for you to surrender. He isn't twenty-five feet away."

She slipped in the car, crouched below the level of the window. Dr. Broughton started the motor with a roar.

"Hold it!" the cop yelled.

Heavy feet pounded to a halt beside the car. The cop's light speared through the window. Paula pressed herself against the floor. The light splashed in Dr. Broughton's eyes. He blinked, drew back.

"What the devil is the idea?" he demanded.

"A girl just committed murder in there!" the policeman barked, his tone matching that of Broughton.

Broughton's heavy jaw sagged.

"Murder! Why, I didn't see anyone. I—

I'm Doctor Carl Broughton. I just came out of the hospital."

"I've seen your name and picture in the paper." The bluecoat's voice now was tinged with respect. "You say the girl didn't duck between these cars here?"

Broughton mopped his face.

"I didn't say that. I said I didn't see her duck in. How am I to know what a girl might have done?"

"Yeah, I guess not. It sure was a brutal murder, Doctor. Huh! I can see the tabloid headlines and pictures already! If you see her, yell."

"You bet!" Broughton ground the starter again. "If the girl's around on the parking lot any place you'd better get going and see if you can find her."

"I'll find her," the policeman promised grimly. The roar of Broughton's motor cut off anything further he might have said.

Paula felt the car bounce slightly as Dr. Broughton tooled it from the drive that led from the parking lot to the street. He leaned toward her.

"You can get up now," he said.

She rose, sat beside him. Her hair was moist, her uniform stained. The windshield wipers beat a racing cadence to Broughton's voice as he said: "You want to tell me about it, my dear?"

She stared ahead.

"Lou Blane's murderer finally managed to do the job." She turned to look at her companion's rugged, hairless profile. "You've put your neck out for me, Doctor."

"We'll skip that. You know how I feel about you, Paula. Why did you run?"

"I was a little crazy, I guess, with shock," she said at last.

She told him details of the attack on her, and the murder of Lou Blane. "Few people know it, Doctor," she finished, "but I had reason enough to want Blane dead."

"But you didn't kill him." It was not a question.

"No," she said frankly. "But can you see how I felt? Nothing but a shadow, that's all I saw. In the eyes of the law I was alone in that room with Lou Blane. I had no one to back my testimony. They would claim I'd committed murder, struck myself on the crown of my head, and told a wild tale in an attempt to escape. You know," she said quietly, "what they would have done with me."

His powerful jaw muscles ridged in the dashboard light.

"Pinning a murder on a shadow would have been a tough job," he conceded. "Especially when they had the real murderess—to all appearances—under their thumb to wring a confession from. With the facts, they'd have been duty bound to do everything in their power to convict you of murder. I can see how you felt." He added that gently.

She leaned back, closed her eyes.

"Where are you taking me, Doctor Broughton?"

"Wherever you want to go."

They were driving down a dark, deserted street. On the corner glowed the light of an all-night drug store.

"Then I'll get out here," she said, her mind suddenly made up.

"I can't let you do that," he said tightly. "I can't leave you here, alone and hounded by the police."

"Please, Doctor Broughton!" she pleaded.

"But your clothes!" he protested.

"I couldn't chance going to my apartment now. I'll manage. But I won't let you put your neck in a noose."

Reluctantly, he slowed.

"But where can I get in touch with you? How can I help you?"

How could anyone?

"I'll phone you, Doctor, if I need you," she said.

His fingers closed almost harshly over her wrist.

"That's a promise?"

"Yes. I'll get out now. It's for the best. They'll be after you. That policeman knew only one car had left the lot and it won't take him all night to suspect I couldn't have got off the parking lot any other way. I'll leave it to you to figure out a story." She forced a smile. "If you want to help me, you don't want to get yourself in jail as an accomplice."

HE OPENED the door for her. She stepped out on the damp sidewalk. She watched until the tail-light of his car had disappeared. Then she turned toward the drug store.

There was no one inside but a rawboned, elderly man. She slipped inside. The old man yawned, squinted at her, shuffled forward.

"I want to use your phone," Paula said.

He jerked his gnarled thumb toward the phone booth in back.

"But I—" She twisted her hands—"I mean

your business phone. I don't have any money with me. I— There's been an accident. I want to call a doctor."

His tired, gimlet eyes took in her spotted uniform, the moisture on her clothes, her blond hair. His eyes half-closed, he searched her face. He fished in his watch pocket, pulled out three nickels, laid them on the counter. Then deliberately, he turned his back on her, missing her quick look of gratitude before she hurried to the phone.

The phone rang four times before Larry said a sleepy "Hello."

"Larry! Thank heavens! I was beginning to think you weren't going to answer. I—I'm in trouble, Larry."

Sleep vanished from his voice. "Where are you, Paula?"

"In a little drug store at the corner of Fourth and Wildwood. Be careful, Larry. It's serious. It's murder."

"Murder?" he breathed. "Who?"

"Lou Blane."

"I'll be right down."

"Larry!"

"Yes?"

"Bring me a coat of some kind. I look a sight, and this uniform can be spotted a block away."

Paula hung up, choked with relief.

CHAPTER IV

A Dead Man Is Hard to Find

THE policeman who had come up to Lou Blane's room in the hospital had said that Blane had lived with a Mrs. Flaherty at Four-thirty-three Jared Avenue. Paula looked at the two remaining nickels the old man had given her, which lay on the small shelf beside the phone.

She opened the phone book, found Mrs. Flaherty's number.

"Hello!" a shrill voice, sharp with annoyance, finally answered.

"Mrs. Flaherty?" Paula asked hurriedly. "I hate to bother you this late, but it's important."

"Eh? It'd better be! I'm an old woman. I chased off most of my roomers to keep from being bothered at all hours like this. After what happened to Lou Blane early tonight, getting cut up and all like he did, I should have chased 'em all off!"

Paula ignored the vinegar in the cracked voice.

"I'm trying to locate someone named Violet, Mrs. Flaherty," she said. "A Violet who knew Lou Blane."

"Violet's here."

Paula couldn't speak for a moment. In his ether dream in the hospital, Lou Blane had said, "Violet knows—Violet knows." Paula couldn't quite dare believe that this was salvation dropped in her lap.

"Could I speak to Violet?" she asked shakily.

"Are you crazy?" Mrs. Flaherty demanded. "Violet's out in the garage. And a devil of a time the policeman had getting her there, out of Lou Blane's room. Personally I didn't try to get Violet out of the room before the police arrived. Regular little spitfire, Violet is. Raises sand every time a stranger comes around her, and everybody was a stranger but Lou Blane."

"I—I don't understand," quavered Paula. "Violet in the garage?"

"Lord give me patience, young woman! Violet belongs in the garage, I say. She's nothing but a dog, and a darned ornery little fox terrier at that."

A dog. Violet knows. Why can't a dog speak? This was the tearing of the fragile straw from the hands of a drowning person.

"Well, are you still there, young woman?" Mrs. Flaherty demanded.

Paula half sobbed. "I'm still here."

"I wonder if you've been drinking, young woman, calling up at this hour to ask about a dog! As if I wasn't bothered enough when he brought the dog home. Said the dog'd taken such a shine to him that he'd bought her. Lou Blane was dropped on his head when he was a baby, I bet. I always suspected he was a regular killer. Hard, you know, but he liked pets. Had a cat once. I've read stuff about these killer persons having unmatching character traits like that. One feller had a yen for flowers—"

Paula put the receiver on its hook.

The lanky old man watched her come from the phone booth.

"Cup of coffee, lady?" he asked.

"No, I—"

"On the house." He showed he hadn't any teeth when he grinned. "I'm sorta lonesome anyhow." He drew coffee into a thick mug from a dented urn. "Some say I'm an ornery old cuss, lady." He put the coffee before her. "My daughter—just about your age. Good

girl, with a face like yours." His eyes were rheumy. "You believe in faces, lady?"

"Why, I don't know."

"I always say a person's soul is in his face. Especially in the eyes. I like the straight way you look at folks, lady, even when you're in bad trouble."

She took a faltering step back from the counter.

"Don't spill your coffee, lady," he said. "But there's a car parked across the street, drew up while you were in the phone booth. If you look, easy-like, you can see the man who got out of the car. He seems to be waiting for you."

She clutched the coffee mug with her hands. The man was standing in a doorway across the street. The shadows about him didn't cut off the light from the street lamp entirely. He was heavy, dark. She had seen him once before in her life—tonight, just before the murder of Lou Blane. He was the strange man who had been in the waiting room in the hospital, who had told her she was not the Paula Sloan for whom he was looking. The man who had fixed her likeness so thoroughly in his mind with his hard, black eyes.

Coffee splashed over the rim of the cup, scalding, but bringing no sensation. She was in the vortex of a swirling nightmare that had begun with the murder of Lou Blane, the first night Sis lay under the cold earth.

"Easy, lady," murmured the old man.

"What'll I do?" she choked.

"You can't call the police, can you?"

She shook her head.

"Even if you could, lady, what would you tell them? We know that man is waiting for you, but he'd laugh it off to the police, say he was waiting for a lady friend from one of the flats around here."

"I'll wait," she whispered. "When he sees Larry drive up and come in, the man will go away."

"Or do something to Larry, whoever he is," the old man remnided.

PAULA shivered. The old man stood with a hesitant air, drumming his big-knuckled fingers on the counter.

"All right, so I am a meddlesome old fool," he muttered. He looked at Paula. "Lady, I don't know you, just things an observant old feller would know by looking at you, watching you. But after a couple minutes, you go back to the phone booth again."

The old man walked toward the back of the store.

Over the rim of the coffee cup, Paula eased her gaze back to the man across the street. He hadn't moved. Silent, mocking, so sure of getting her. She choked on the coffee.

The old man came back behind the counter.

"You look in the phone booth now," he said. "Maybe our pal across the street will think you're making another call. There's a back door out of the place beside the booth."

Paula stumbled to the rear of the store, opened the door of the booth, eased inside. A worn, rough tweed coat hung on the mouthpiece of the telephone. A coat belonging to the old man's daughter, Paula guessed. She slipped into it.

The old man gave her no chance to thank him when she came out of the booth, but nodded her frantically toward the door beside the phone booth.

The door opened into a narrow corridor, dimly-lighted. Paula ran between cardboard cartons, empty jugs. Rain swept over her face when she opened the door at the end of the corridor. Clinging to shadows, she plunged down the sidewalk.

She was on a dark street perpendicular to the one on which the heavy man had been standing. Once she reached the corner ahead, she could turn, double back.

She was halfway to the corner when headlights flared behind her. The heavy man, she realized sickeningly, was a fast thinker.

The lights were blinding, growing. They pinned her against the brick wall of a building, her arms outflung, fingers digging in the rough stone. She heard the rolling thunder of a gun, whimpered as brick chips stung her cheek. She flung herself down on the wet sidewalk, making her body as small as possible.

A second shot rang out, heavier than the first. Paula opened her eyes. The car swerved and another of the duller, heavier shots crashed. The old man had left his drug store. He was down at the corner, beside the store, a heavy pistol in his hand. The car hesitated. Then the heavy man gave it full throttle, taking the corner ahead with the growl of rubber on wet concrete.

The old man ran up as Paula staggered to her feet.

"I'm all right!" she gasped.

"You better get moving then, lady, and fast. Our pal in the car knew the shots would

attract the cop on the beat. I'll tell Hannrihan a tall tale about a burglar in my store to account for the shots, but being a cop, Hannrihan better not find you here."

She panted for breath.

"When Larry comes to your store, he'll ask about me, describe me to you. Will you tell him I've gone to Four-thirty-three Jared Avenue?"

"I'll tell him."

Paula paused at the edge of the sidewalk.

"I can't ever thank you for this," she said gratefully.

"You don't need to." The old man's voice almost broke. "You look enough like my own daughter for me to do what I can. She died a week ago, lady," he growled. "Now get! That man in the car is playing for keeps, and he thinks on his feet."

The vestibule of Four-thirty-three Jared Avenue was a dusty mouth yawning before the black throat of the hallway that led to the musty depths of the house. A light clicked in the hallway, reluctantly dispelling a small portion of the darkness. A thin woman in a patched robe stood under the light, squinting through gold-rimmed spectacles.

"What do you want?" Her voice was like her face, sharp, used by the years, terminating in a point.

Wet and shivering, Paula moved into the wan light.

"Mrs. Flaherty, I'm Lou Blane's sister."

"Well, what do you want me to do about it? This is the second time I been woke up tonight. Your voice sounds like—Say, do you happen to be the one who called about Violet?"

"No," Paula lied.

"Well, I wish somebody would get that dog away from here. Lou let her sleep under his bed all the time. Just laughed at me when I raised Cain about it."

"Mrs. Flaherty," Paula said, "Lou is dead."

Mrs. Flaherty's face softened faintly, as if the effort were a costly one.

"Oh," was all she said.

"I'd like to look at his things, if you don't mind," Paula said. "Maybe I can get some ideas—a better idea than the police—about who hated him so."

"Well, all right," Mrs. Flaherty gave in, after a moment. "My night's sleep is ruined anyhow. I—well, I'm sorry your brother is dead, Miss Blane. You come on up to his room. It's just like the police left it."

IT WAS a large, rambling room with a bay window. Paula first looked through the bureau. There wasn't much. A few shirts, some socks. In the second drawer was a bundle of letters which had already been gone over by the police. Lying loose in the third drawer were several newspaper clippings.

Paula read the first one:

BANK BANDIT, WOUNDED BY POLICE, MAKES GETAWAY

Brud Rankin, notorious hood, was sorely wounded today by members of the Police Department when he attempted to hold up the First Trust Bank. A statement made by Inspector P. J. Reilly predicted the early capture of Rankin. Brud Rankin, Reilly asserted, cannot travel far in his present, serious condition.

The next clipping was captioned:

HIJACKERS, SHOT IN RUNNING GUNFIGHT, DISAPPEAR

Three more clippings followed the same vein, telling of wounded crooks on the lam. Then Paula found a three-column picture that had been torn from a paper. It was captioned:

BRUD RANKIN DEAD?

The prediction that Brud Rankin, hood who escaped the police almost two weeks ago, would be captured has failed to materialize. Is Rankin dead from police-inflicted wounds in some hole in which he hoped to elude capture?

Paula knew "Brud" Rankin was not dead. Now that she had seen this picture she knew she had seen him three times tonight. Once in the waiting room in the hospital, again in the shadows across the street from the drug store. The third time she had glimpsed his face behind headlights, an indistinct blur, when he had tried to shoot her.

Nothing seemed to make sense. She was on a mad merry-go-round of murder, the music shrilling, clashing in her ears.

Mrs. Flaherty's yawning grunt was not subtle, but was a broad invitation for Paula to leave. Paula turned from the bureau. There was nothing more here. If there had been, the police would probably have it.

The doorbell rattled downstairs.

"People!" Mrs. Flaherty said. "Some day I'm going to move to the South Pole."

Paula followed Mrs. Flaherty down the stairs. In the downstairs hall she eased back in the shadows as Mrs. Flaherty went toward the front door.

The landlady opened the door. It was not

Brud Rankin reappearing. Paula let out her breath as Larry's voice came to her.

'A man in the drug store on the corner of Fourth and Wildwood told me I'd find—"

"Here I am, Larry!"

Paula ran forward. He caught her arm, looked at the landlady, but held his questions. Mrs. Flaherty slammed the front door as they went through it.

On the sidewalk, Larry turned Paula to face him.

"You didn't say much over the phone." He stopped, staring at her face. She was looking over his shoulder.

"That car parked there!" she breathed.

She went rigid as a voice came out of the shadows:

"Yeah, babe, my car. You didn't really think I'd give up when I turned the corner after the nosy old geezer in the drug store shot at me, did you? It was easy enough to cruise back in the neighborhood of the drug store, spot you as you passed under a light, then follow you. I could have picked you off a dozen times, babe, but I was curious to see where you were coming. Now since the boy friend's happened along, I'm glad I waited."

Brud Rankin stepped out of the shadows, a gun in his hand pointed at Larry. And Rankin looked as if he was an expert in the use of a gun.

CHAPTER V

"You Bet Your Life, Babe!"

LARRY pushed Paula behind him. Rankin laughed.

"Think that'll do you any good, bud?" he growled. "Right now it ain't the girl I want."

Larry stepped forward. Rankin jerked the gun up.

"It's you, bud, you!"

Rankin was fast. The lighting was poor. The crunch of the gun on bone strangled a scream in Paula's throat.

Momentarily, the thin rivulets of dirty water snaking across the sidewalk were disturbed. Then they were smooth again, flowing around Larry's limp fingers.

Paula sprang at Brud Rankin. His laugh was thin as he slapped her across the face with his open hand. She reeled back.

"Just listen, babe. That's all. When I tried to shoot you before the old geezer in the drug store cut himself a hand in the deal, I planned to pick up your body, then let it be found by the police. Suicide, you know. It would look as if you killed Lou Blane and couldn't live with your conscience any longer. But I'm a lad who can change his plans on the spur of the moment. Your boy friend is out cold. I'm going to load him in my car. If you ever want to see him again you'll march straight to the nearest cop. You'll tap him on the shoulder and say, Mr. Policeman, put me in a cell. I murdered a man tonight. His name was Lou Blane.' You understand, babe?"

"No," Paula choked, "I don't understand. Why are you doing this to me? I never saw you before tonight. I've never done anything to you."

"It's strictly a business proposition with me, babe. You die, I collect. Simple enough? The mug paying me ain't stingy, so I guess I collect, babe." He bent, clutched Larry's collar, his gun on Paula unwaveringly. "Think of your boy friend. You're gambling your life, babe. Against his."

Rankin handled Larry like a sack of meal. Rankin's car door slammed, the motor roared. Then Brud Rankin and Larry were gone.

The wetness of the night pressed down upon Paula. Then she thought of Larry's car, ran to it, jerked the door open. He had taken the keys from the ignition. There was no way to follow Brud Rankin's black coupe. No way out, except to gamble her life for Larry's.

She didn't know how long she sprawled in the seat of Larry's car. Neither did she realize exactly when the idea came to her, but as the full import of it hit her, she knew there was a way to make Violet, the speechless dog, name the person behind the nightmare!

Feeling her way, Paula crept across the yard, around the side of the house. The back yard was small, littered with refuse that smelled rank in the rain. Mrs. Flaherty had said that Violet had been taken to the garage, evidently the sagging hulk at Paula's left.

She made her way across the yard, opened the garage door. The place was silent, empty. The moon rode free of clouds for a moment and Paula could see the short length of rope on the hasp of the garage door to which Violet had been tied.

She turned away, saw the hulking shadow of a man.

"You had your chance, babe," Brud Ran-

kin said. "You should have taken it. It'll be a lot more messy this way." He advanced a step. "You didn't think I'd drive off and just leave you be, did you? I only had to turn the corner, tap your boy friend with the gun again to make sure he don't go no place, and come back and see if you were being sensible and heading for the nearest cop."

"You got the dog," Paula said.

"Earlier tonight. But nobody'll think anything of it—but you. Violet was a frisky thing. They'll figure she gnawed the rope in two and ran away, if they bother to think of her at all.

"See, babe, it had to be you all the time, from the minute Lou Blane got away from my boss in Mrs. Flaherty's house and got carried to the hospital. My boss can't take a devil of a lot of investigating, babe. Too much might come out. Still he had to get rid of Blane. That meant you, a perfect fall gal, an airtight case against you, leaving the cops satisfied.

"The boss used to be great friends with Blane, even to the point that he sold Blane one of his dogs. So the boss knew, from Blane, all about the way your sister went. Blane used to brag about the way a woman had killed herself for him. That gave you plenty of motive. You had complete access to Blane's room in the hospital, were supposed to be alone in the room with Blane when he was murdered. Not only that, but you knew of the importance of the dog after you heard Blane mumbling about Violet."

"Yes," Paula said heavily. "I finally realized. Violet hated strangers, but Violet raised no outcry when the murderer came to Blane's room in Mrs. Flaherty's house. That meant the murderer was no stranger to the dog, but her former owner. Since Blane had had the dog only a week I knew the dog tag for Violet had probably been purchased prior to that."

BRUD RANKIN will never relax, she thought hopelessly. He'll keep backing me up at the point of his gun. Now there is no way out.

She forced words.

"I knew that if I could get the dog tag, trace its purchaser, I'd have Violet's former owner, the murderer."

"Smart enough, babe. But a little late. We've been one jump ahead of you from the beginning. We think ahead, and think on our feet. Even knowing about Violet would have done you no good. Think the police would have listened to a wild tale like that with a nice confession from you in their hands? But we couldn't let you run around loose, investigating the dog on your own. You might have got a stronger lead. We couldn't take that chance.

"You might have realized, for example, that I first came to the hospital tonight and had you called down to the reception room not only because I wanted a good look at you. I wanted to be sure I'd recognize you again in case you happened to make a getaway out of the hospital and I had to take a hand. I also called you down to give the boss a chance to get in Blane's hospital room and hide behind the bed screen. We didn't miss a trick, babe. You asked for a murderer. You got one. Let's go."

"I won't go!" Paula was pressed against the grimy wall of the garage. Her fingers searched for a weapon, felt only splinter-filled wood. "I won't go! You'll kill me anyway!"

Brud Rankin made a harsh sound in his throat, moved in close. Paula's last thought before she sank into blackness was that Rankin enjoyed striking people with that gun barrel.

Familiar odors bit Paula's nostrils when she regain consciousness—the smell of antiseptic, the faint, hovering sweetness of chloroform.

She felt the leather arms of a chair under her fingers. Brud Rankin's face swirled in focus before her. She turned her head. She was in a surgery, glistening, white, small but efficient-looking. Larry was sprawled at the base of a table stacked with lab equipment, silent, white. Three drops of blood from the cut on his temple had marred the spotless floor. She wondered numbly if he were dead.

"Too bad it had to be this, my dear," a familiar voice said.

She heard his laugh, his step nearing.

"What are you going to do with us now, Doctor James Craddock?" she demanded.

Craddock stood over her.

"Kill you, of course, both you and Larry. It will look like a double suicide, knowing you'd get caught sooner or later with Lou Blane's blood on your hands. I couldn't under any circumstances, let you out of here now, Paula. You're in a section of the basement of my home. Anyone who sees this

surgery has to be a person who'll keep his mouth shut. I make certain of that, and those who come here pay plenty."

"Criminals," Paula said. She almost choked on the word as she noticed Larry stir.

"Yes, criminals," Craddock said. "I've never been the sort of doctor I used to dream about being when I was a young fool with ideals in my eyes. I've never stood very high at the hospital, and I never would have made a decent living out of private practise. But the boys who get police slugs in them think I'm tops. And I never have to worry about collecting my bills. There's always the chance of another police slug, a moment when the boy will need a good doctor desperately."

"Brud Rankin was one," Paula said.

"Sure." Brud nodded. "The dumb cops thought I'd die in some hole somewhere."

Paula looked from Rankin to James Craddock. "Lou Blane was another."

"That's right." Craddock slipped his hands in his pockets, smiled wryly. "I might as well admit that Blane fooled me, all the way. I trusted him, thought he was a friend, even sold him Violet. Blane was a rat who liked pets and had a terrific knack of blinding people to his true intentions. People such as your sister, Paula, and me.

"I think I still regarded Lou Blane as a friend when he called me to Mrs. Flaherty's house tonight, showed me evidence he had gathered—and which I managed to get away—and gave me the choice of paying through the nose or having the police learn of my surgery here, the men I'd doctored.

"I had no intention of paying. It was too bad for Lou. I'd have finished Lou off on the operating table tonight, but Larry Scott did the surgery and saved Blane—for a while. Even at that, I made all the bobbles I could, bobbles which Larry covered and chalked up to nerves."

Behind Craddock and Rankin, Larry was rising to his feet. Swaying, he bumped the table of lab equipment. A rack of test tubes tilted, fell to the floor with a crash.

Brud Rankin spun, his gun jumping into his hand. Paula screamed, struggled out of the chair. A gun blasted, like the explosion of a buzz bomb in the confines of the surgery. Blood began spilling out of Brud Rankin's neck. He was dead before he hit the floor.

Craddock sprang for Rankin's unfired gun, his head jerking toward the stairway and the beefy man who was standing there.

Dr. Carl Broughton fired again from the stairway, missed. Craddock raised his gun deliberately.

LARRY SCOTT'S fingers found a heavy mortar and pestle on the table of equipment. He ignored the pestle, threw the mortar. The heavy stone left Craddock's face a mask of blood. It seemed to Paula that Craddock fell very slowly.

She was in Larry's arms when Dr. Broughton crossed the surgery to them.

"I made a mistake tonight," Broughton said, "a bad one. When I left you, Paula, at the all-night drug store, I foolishly phoned Craddock, let it slip where you were. Later I realized what I might have done to you, that Craddock would trap you in the drug store or send someone there. I hope this makes up for that mistake."

"More than makes up for it, Doctor," Paula said. Broughton looked down at Craddock's unconscious form and went on.

"I arrived at the right answers, though by a different route. The more I thought of Lou Blane's murder, the more I was positive that someone connected with the hospital had killed him. The only way out of that room was through the door, and a stranger would have had a hard time coming out that door, down the corridor, down four floors, and out of the hospital without being seen.

"I questioned the nurses, found that no stranger had come out of that room, or off that floor. But I did find out from two of the nurses who had been on duty in surgery, that Craddock had been very much a hindrance while Larry operated on Lou Blane. Then I went back to the drug store on the corner of Fourth and Wildwood, learned from the old man that someone had tried to shoot you, Paula.

"I knew that Craddock and myself were the only ones who knew I had left you there, since I'd foolishly phoned. And I knew darn well I hadn't sent anyone there to shoot you. I always thought James Craddock was too poor a doctor to make the money he evidently had." Broughton shrugged his bulky shoulders. "Craddock's butler is upstairs now. I had to lock him in a closet, after tickling him with my gun barrel to get a key to the surgery here. Maybe they'll want him as a witness."

Broughton looked from Paula to Larry, smiled wanly.

"I'm a fool for bettering a rival," he said, "but I haven't a chance with this nurse any-

way. Larry, I think in just a few days I'll be needing an assistant." He turned to Paula. "That takes care of your last objection to marrying him, doesn't it? He'll be making money enough so that your mother couldn't possibly be a burden."

Paula's eyes were misty. "Thank you, Doctor," Larry said.

"If you hadn't earned it you wouldn't be getting it, Larry. The surgery you did on Lou Blane was enough to convince me." Carl Broughton turned toward the stairs. "I'll call the police."

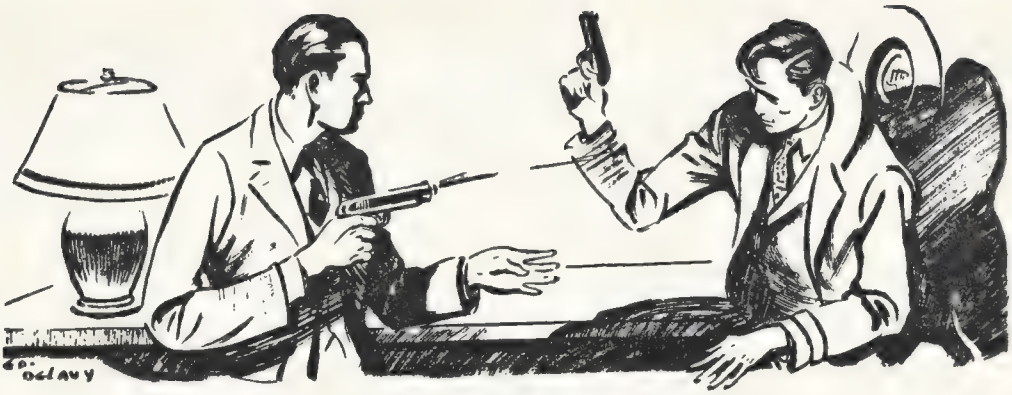
He climbed the stairs heavily. The surgery of Craddock's was silent.

"You heard what he said, didn't you, Nurse?" Larry said.

"I did, Doctor. But you'll have to promise me to make it a strange wedding."

"I don't know if I like that."

"You will. A wedding with two men to give the bride away. Doctor Carl Broughton and,"—she touched the rough tweed coat she had taken from a phone booth—"an old geezer who runs a dusty all-night drug store on the corner of Fourth and Wildwood."



Hammond fired as the killer raised his gun

Another Job for Homicide

By C. K. M. SCANLON

Gary Hammond tackles a clueless murder puzzle!

GARY HAMMOND of Homicide did not act or look like a first grade detective, but he was one of the best men on the New York Police Force. He was slender and dark and looked and dressed like a fairly successful young business man. He was polite to old ladies, kind to children, and tough on crooks.

Now he stood near the door of the living room of a Park Avenue apartment and watched the Homicide Squad at work. The police photographer had finished making angle shots of the corpse sprawled out on the Oriental rug. Dr. Doyle, from the Medical Examiner's office, was tapping one foot impatiently as he waited for the chalk outline of the body to be made.

"He would die on a rug like this," muttered the man with chalk. "It's like trying to make marks on seaweed or something."

"Hurry up," said Dr. Doyle impatiently. "I haven't got all day." He glanced over at Hammond. "Who was he anyway?" he asked.

"Lowell Malden," Hammond said. "Sportsman, man about town, and now he is just as dead as any other mackerel."

"That never made sense to me," said the fingerprint man. He was busily dusting a table with fine powder from a little blower. "I could never see that mackerels were any more dead than anything else."

The man with the chalk gave up, after making what he thought were marks to show where the corpse had fallen. He nodded to the assistant M. E.

"It's about time," Doyle said. He knelt down and began examining the body. "He was shot through the head with a small caliber bullet—a thirty-two I'd say."

"Not without probing for it, you won't," said Hammond. "You can't always be sure of the size of a bullet by the hole it makes, Doctor."

"Go question your suspects, Hammond," said Dr. Doyle. "You bother me."

"That's what makes this a nice open and shut case," Hammond told him. "There aren't any suspects. Half an hour ago Homicide gets a call to come to this apartment—there has been a murder. When we get here the apartment door is closed but not locked and there is no one around but the late Mr. Malden. Which makes the whole thing just ducky."

"Lethal death by person or persons unknown," remarked Doyle as he got to his feet. "And I don't mean maybe." He yawned. "If you're worried about the caliber of the bullet I'll do an autopsy, Hammond."

"It might help," agreed Gary Hammond. "We haven't even got the murder weapon."

"Oh, my!" murmured Doyle, as he headed for the door. "You have got a pretty kettle of fish, and I don't mean mackerel!"

SOME of the Homicide men were going through the building questioning the other tenants and the employees. Malden had been a bachelor who lived alone. Anyone could have walked in, killed him with one shot, then phoned the police to report the murder, and departed.

Hammond was wondering just how to begin with this puzzle when a slender, gray-haired man came bustling into the living room. It struck Hammond that if this man had been a woman he would have worn old-fashioned petticoats that rustled.

"I'm James Clinton," the gray-haired man announced pompously. "Representing the Skyhigh Real Estate Company, owners of this building." He glanced at the corpse once, and looked quickly away. "There must be no publicity, of course," he told the Homicide man hastily. "Absolutely no publicity, you understand. Might give the building a bad name."

"Sez he," drawled a short, stocky man who had followed the real estate man into the room. He wore a press card in his hat band. "Lowell Malden gets bumped off, and the papers are just going to ignore the whole thing. Oh, yeah, your father's mustache!"

"Don't tell me," put in the police photographer, a man named Clark. "Let me guess. It's a newspaperman, or maybe he just acts like that because he's seen too many reporters in the movies."

"I'm a newspaperman," the stocky man said shortly, pulling a note-book and a pencil out of his pocket as if to prove it. "Harry Newton, of the *Evening Blade*. When did the murder occur, who killed him, and why?"

"Goody, goody!" applauded the fingerprint man, staring wide-eyed at the leather-bound notebook in the self-introduced Newton's hand. "A real journalist! I always wanted to see one. You know I was nearly fourteen before I really believed there were such things as elephants."

"Who is in charge here?" demanded the gray-haired Clinton impatiently. "I insist that there will be no publicity. I'm warning you if there is we'll sue."

"That I must see," said Gary Hammond dryly. "Go ahead, Newton, write it up. You know—it is rumored that the alleged body of a man believed to be Lowell Malden was found apparently dead in an apartment of what is said to be a building supposedly located on Park Avenue in what is frequently referred to as the city of New York."

"You mean I'm the only reporter here?" demanded Newton eagerly. "That I've got a real beat?"

Hammond grinned and the photographer and the fingerprint man snorted. Then the men from the morgue appeared with the big basket. One of them looked at Hammond for orders.

"All right," said Hammond. "Take him away."

The men placed the body in the basket and carried it out. James Clinton looked as if he felt sick. Newton was standing beside a table with a telephone on it, busily writing in his note-book.

"I was here earlier this morning," Clinton said, after the body was gone. "The front door of the apartment was open a trifle, and I heard Mr. Malden quarreling with someone. They—they seemed very angry."

"Could you hear what they said?" Hammond was interested now.

"Well, I heard Mr. Malden say, 'I'm tired of this blackmail'," said Clinton. And he also said, " 'if you keep on bothering me any longer I'll kill you, Lance'."

"You're sure that Malden called the other man Lance?" demanded Hammond.

"Positive." Clinton nodded. "But remember—there must be no publicity about all this."

"Have I got a story!" exclaimed Newton. "Millionaire murdered when he refuses extortion threats of blackmailer!" He headed for the door. "I've got to get back to the paper and write this yarn in a hurry."

"Just a moment, Newton." Hammond stopped him. "We've got police on guard at the elevator and downstairs with orders to let no one in or out of this building. You won't be able to get out unless I have you passed through."

"Nonsense!" snapped Newton. "Why those police downstairs let me right through when they saw my press card. I'll get out all right."

He disappeared through the door before Hammond could say anything further. James Clinton, staring after him, looked perturbed.

"I insisted there would be no publicity, and I—" he began.

"Aw, play another record," said Photographer Clark, as he picked up his camera. "I'm tired of hearing that tune."

"Run along, boys," Hammond told the Homicide crew. "I want to talk to Mr. Clinton. The Squad can go back now."

"Gee, thanks, Teacher," Clark said in a high voice, and then to the finger-print men. "Come on—recess!"

THEY departted, leaving Hammond alone in the apartment with Clinton of Sky-high Real Estate. Hammond questioned the man for some time, but Clinton stuck to his story that he had heard only those few words of the quarrel between Malden and the unknown "Lance." Then he had left, deciding to see Malden some other time. He declared he was not sure that he would recognize Lance's voice if he heard it again.

"Thanks, anyway," Hammond finally said. "You've been a great help, Mr. Clinton. And tell your firm that they don't need to worry about bad publicity. The owners of a building aren't to blame if one of the tenants happens to be murdered in it."

"I guess you are right," Clinton said reluctantly, and handed Hammond a card. "You can reach me at this address if you should want me for anything."

The two men walked to the door of the apartment together. "About getting out of the building," Clinton said. "Will I have any trouble about that?"

"Don't believe so," said Hammond. "The Homicide Squad probably took off the guard on the building when they left."

Clinton left, and Gary Hammond closed the door and went back into the living room. He opened the drawer of the telephone table and found an address book. Thumbing through it he found the name of John Lance, with an address and telephone number. He blinked when he noticed that the address was this same apartment building. He phoned the doorman and learned that Lance had apartment 70 on the seventh floor.

"So Lance lives here," he muttered, as he cradled the phone. "And on the floor above this. Guess I'd better pay him a visit."

Hammond reached for his hat and overcoat where he had left them when he had arrived, then decided to leave them there while he went upstairs to see John Lance. Leaving the apartment he went up the stairs to the seventh floor. There he found an apartment door with "Lance" on the card above the bell.

He had reached out a hand to ring the bell when he changed his mind. Instead, he tried the knob. The door was unlocked. Silently he pushed the door open and walked into a small hall. It was dark there, even though it was a bright winter day.

Hammond paused for a moment, then turned to close the door behind him. And at that moment a figure came hurling at him. He was struck with such force that he was knocked up against the door. He grabbed for his assailant, but missed.

The door had been flung back so that he was in the narrow space between it and the wall. He gave a shove and the door slammed shut. And by the time he got it open again his attacker had raced out into the hall and disappeared somewhere along the corridor.

"Nice," muttered Hammond disgustedly. "Had him right in my hands and let him go."

Gary Hammond went back into the apartment and closed the door. Moving along the hall he reached another door and opened it. For a moment all he could do was stand there staring at the still figure lying on the floor of a living room—a young man sprawled on his back near a couch. He was fully dressed, and the Homicide's man's first glance told him the man was dead.

"Another murder!" he muttered tightly.

Dropping to his knees, he examined the man on the floor. It was a corpse lying there all right, the corpse of a man who had been stabbed through the heart, apparently by a knife. But the weapon was missing.

Hammond searched the dead man's pockets and found letters, a wallet containing a good bit of money, and a draft classification card for John Lance.

"Another job for Homicide," thought Hammond, as he got to his feet.

He found a phone and reported the murder.

"Yes, I'll be here when you arrive," he said over the wire.

As Hammond cradled the phone he caught sight of a portable typewriter on a small desk in one corner of the room. A sheet of paper was in the machine. Hammond walked over to it and read what had been typed:

> I saw you sneak into M's apartment just before the police arrived, so I know you killed him. I know you did it because M had found that you raised a check you got for a hundred dollars from him to ten thousand and got the money. Is my silence worth five thousand to you?

The note was not addressed and was unsigned.

Hammond swung around, and reached for his gun as the doorbell rang. He went to the door and opened it. Harry Newton, the reporter, stood there.

"Oh, it's you," Newton said. "I came back after I wrote my story. I thought I might get something to add to it if I talked to Mr. Lance. Is he here?"

"He's here." Hammond nodded toward the living room. "In there."

NEWTON walked along the hall with Hammond behind him.

The gun was in the side pocket of the detective's coat.

Newton stopped short, and gasped as he saw the corpse.

"Great heavens!" he cried. "What happened to Lance?"

"You know what happened to him," Hammond said coldly. "You killed him—just as you killed Malden, only you used a knife this time."

"What?" Newton swung around, glaring at Hammond. "You're crazy!"

"No," Hammond said, in the same cold tone. "You did it. Like a lot of murderers you've been too smart. You were still in this building when the police arrived after you phoned and reported Malden's murder. You found you couldn't get out, so you decided to bluff it through by pretending you were a newspaperman."

"I am a newspaperman!" protested Newton. "And you're raving mad!"

"A regular newspaperman seldom carries a note-book." Hammond shrugged. "And when he gets a good murder story with no other reporters around he don't rush back to his paper with it." The detective smiled grimly. "Not when he is standing right beside a phone as you were in Malden's apartment, and could have phoned in your story."

"All right." Newton shrugged. "So I'm not so hot as a reporter. But what reason would I have for killing Malden and Lance?"

"The motive is over in Lance's typewriter," said Hammond. "I guess you didn't have time to see it since I came in here just after you killed him, and you fought with me while getting away. You raised a check that Malden gave you. He found out about it and you killed him."

"Go on," said Newton, his voice suddenly hard.

"Lance saw the killing, or at least knew you did it," Malden went on. "He was blackmailing Malden, and he decided to try a shake-down on you. But you wouldn't stand for it, and killed him."

Hammond lifted his head as he heard voices out in the hall. The Homicide Squad had returned. He heard Newton snarl, saw the man's hand flash up, holding a gun. Hammond shot him through the right shoulder before Newton could fire. The gun dropped from the killer's hand.

"Hardly the action of an innocent man," remarked Gary Hammond. "And that's a help."

The men from Homicide came bursting into the room. The same Squad who had been in Malden's apartment earlier.

"Here we go again, boys," called Clark, the photographer, as he saw the corpse. "Another job for Homicide."

"Just routine this time," Hammond said casually. "I've already got the killer."

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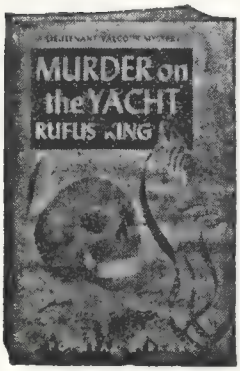

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"Hold it," Kelly shouted. "Let go of that wrench or I'll drill a hole through you."

PLEASE, I KILLED HIM

By WAYLAND RICE

Detective-sergeant Patrick Kelly caught the murdering jewel thief red-handed, but he just couldn't prove a thing on him!

SERGEANT PATRICK KELLY heard the crash of shattering glass, halted in his tracks and automatically swung his bright blue eyes and brick-red head, toward the higher reaches of a big apartment house.

A small black object was hurtling downward. Sergeant Kelly yelled to a woman with a baby carriage, did some fancy sprinting himself as the falling object crashed in a welter of glass to the sidewalk near the curb. Kelly picked it up. It was a somewhat battered metal bookend, shaped like an Indian astride a weary looking horse.

It was made of bronze and heavy enough to serve as a lethal weapon. Kelly eyed the angle from the apartment window to the place the object had fallen. It was clear that it had been hurled at someone in the apartment and not dropped to the street by accident.

Kelly tucked the bookend beneath his arm,

stepped back and studied the set-up of the apartment house. The broken window was on the fourteenth floor front.

Kelly raced into the building and found an elevator on the ground floor. He was whisked up fourteen flights and he estimated that no more than two minutes—three at the most—had passed since the bookend smashed through the window.

He picked out the correct apartment easily enough and rang the buzzer. There was no answer. He banged on the door and then applied an ear to the panel. He could hear someone moving stealthily about the apartment.

Kelly banged again and added his voice to the din.

"This is the law." He roared. "Open that door or I'll shoot the lock off. Open up. Now!"

The hesitating steps came closer to the door. A spring lock turned and a middle-aged man, slightly bald, with a face as white as alabaster, stared at Kelly. His eyes held a haunted hunted look. His hands were trembling and his mouth was slackly ajar.

One other thing Kelly noticed before he looked over the man's shoulder. The right shirt cuff was freshly stained with bright red blood!

Then Kelly saw the corpse that was stretched out on the floor in front of a very large desk. The body was that of a white-haired, heavy-set man of about sixty. The eyes were wide open and staring at the ceiling. Imbedded to the hilt, was a knife in his chest.

Kelly grabbed the man in the door with his free arm, twisted him around quickly and held him secure while he searched for hidden weapons.

Finding the man unarmed he propelled him further into the room, kicking the door shut behind him.

"Why did you kill him?" Kelly demanded flatly.

THE MAN gulped, his lips moved and his face turned the color of Kelly's hair but he couldn't talk. He tried again and again desperately, then finally a croak came forth.

"I . . . didn't . . . kill him. Honest, I didn't do it. Honestly, I swear—"

"Now, look." Kelly planked the bookend on the desk beside its mate. "I know a murder set-up when I see it."

"I—I'm not saying it wasn't murder." The little man choked out.

"Well, that's something," Kelly grunted. "The dead man knew you were going to kill him. He heaved that bookend at you, or maybe through the window deliberately to attract attention. At any rate, you knifed him right after he threw the bookend."

"I didn't! I didn't!" The man screamed. "I didn't kill him. I didn't do—"

"Look." Kelly's patience wasn't especially noteworthy and it was becoming exhausted very fast. "Here you are in a room, locked from the inside. Here is a man who has been stabbed through the heart. The crime took place less than five minutes ago. Your shirt cuff is bloody. There is no one else in this room except you. It's a clear case of being caught redhanded. I'll bet that even your fingerprints are on that knife."

"Oh, they are. Yes, indeed." The man seemed a trifle proud of that statement. "Will you let me talk now, please? Let me explain what actually hapened."

"Make it good," Kelly warned him sarcastically.

"I didn't kill him." The man seemed more secure now. "My name is Jan Nixon. I live on this floor. Apartment 14D. That's far down the hall. I was passing by this door. It was partly open. I looked in and I saw this—this dead man's feet. So, naturally, I came in. The window was broken. A breeze came through and slammed the door shut. I wasn't sure he was dead. I—I lost my head. I started to pull the knife out because it looked as if it was hurting him."

Kelly guffawed. He roared—and brought out handcuffs.

"That's the goofiest yarn I ever heard. I've enough evidence on you to hold you on suspicion of murder. Later, we'll find out why you murdered him. Who is he, by the way?"

"His name is or rather was Frank Bergson." Nixon said. "You will discover that I hated him. We were in business together, but he got control of it and threw me out. You haven't said anything about the note."

"What note?" Kelly asked, surprised.

"It's lying there, just under his shoulder." Nixon pointed to a folded white paper. "There is something written on it. I never had a chance to see."

Kelly walked over to the body, saw the edge of the note and yanked it free. It was written on plain white paper with black ink inscribed in printed letters.

I KILLED BERGSON BECAUSE HE HAD NO RIGHT TO LIVE ANY LONGER. I HATED HIM FOR YEARS AND THE HATE GREW AND GREW UNTIL I HAD TO ACT UPON IT. FOR THE WRONG BERGSON DID ME, HE NOW GETS HIS JUST PUNISHMENT.

There was no signature. Kelly held the note gingerly by one edge only. He walked to the desk, procured other papers and compared the note with them. The size of the paper, the quality and the water mark matched that used by the killer. The fountain pen in the ornate holder on the desk showed signs of having been used recently. He appropriated this too, carefully preserving any prints that might be on it. Nixon, standing behind him, read the strange note aloud. Kelly faced him.

"Despite all this, Mr. Nixon, you're still under arrest on suspicion of murder. You can't blame me for taking you in."

"No," Nixon gulped. "No. I—I'd do the same thing if I were in your position. I don't see how I can prove my innocence. But then," he added brightly, "I can't see how you can prove I'm the actual murderer either. No one saw me kill this man."

Kelly phoned Headquarters and had a detail sent out. Upon their arrival, he turned the apartment and the evidence he had gathered over to them. He kept the note, and conveyed Jan Nixon to Headquarters. After booking Nixon on suspicion of murder he questioned him for two hours without gaining the slightest additional evidence.

Captain Donahue, grizzled, tough and wise, took over after Kelly had explained the case to him. Two more hours went by and Donahue came out of the questioning room with a puzzled frown on his wet face. He mopped his brow and shook his head.

"I don't know, Kelly." He said tiredly. "I honestly don't know. I sweated that guy. Threw everything I had at him and still he didn't crack. He just says over and over again he didn't do it and try and prove he did."

KELLY ran fingers through his red hair. "Captain, of course he did it. I was on the scene in two minutes. Nixon had no chance to get clear. He took a devil of a long time in opening the door if he was an innocent man. I'm sure he used that time for thinking hard. Nixon is clever. He never lost his head once and I laid plenty of traps for him."

Donahue nodded.

"He's either innocent or the coolest murderer we ever had on the mat. He told me, very frankly, that he hated Bergson enough to knock him off and in the same breath tells me, for the sixty-seventh time, that he didn't do it."

"I'll have to pick up more evidence." Kelly sighed. "Suppose you talk with the D.A. while I do that."

"Go ahead." Donahue shrugged. "Check on his character. Try to trace the knife. By the way, there were no prints on anything in the room except the knife handle. Nixon's fingers were all over that."

"No others?" Kelly asked with a frown.

"No—should there have been?"

"I don't know, Captain." Kelly was thinking hard. "I don't know a blasted thing about this except that we have a prisoner who committed murder and next to nothing to convict him on. I'll see you as soon as I get a line."

The phone rang and Captain Donahue answered it. He handed the instrument to Kelly. A man's voice was at the other end. A voice that spoke in a flat monotone.

"Sergeant Kelly. You are making a grave error. Jan Nixon did not murder Frank Bergson."

With his free hand Kelly signalled wildly to Donahue to trace the call.

"How do you know?" He asked into the phone, searching vainly for recognition of the voice.

"Because I killed Bergson. Look here, Sergeant," the voice droned on, "I could not have been in the apartment after you arrived. So if I tell you certain facts, you will know they are true. First of all, Bergson threw a bookend out of the window. Bergson lay on his back directly in front of the desk, a knife through his heart that wasn't really a knife. At any rate, it was on his desk before, being used as a letter opener. I placed a note under his left shoulder. The shoulder closest to the desk."

"What was in the note?" Kelly asked. He could see his case against Nixon evaporating into thin air.

"It read," Smug and confident, the voice recited, " 'I killed Bergson because he had no right to live any longer. I hated him for years and the hate grew and grew until I had to act upon it. For the wrong Bergson did to me, he now gets his just punishment'."

Kelly took a long breath.

"Why don't you come down here and talk to me?" He asked, stalling for time.

"And be locked up?" The voice laughed easily. "Sergeant, you surprise me. As it stands now, I have nothing to fear. You can't possibly trace me. But I do not want an innocent man locked up for a crime I committed. Good-by, Sergeant. I have to leave here fast. I imagine all sorts of radio cars are converging on this place right now."

The phone clicked. Kelly hung up. Donahue, on another wire, ordered the patrol cars to the address of a drug store at least a mile away. Kelly raced out to the garage, appropriated the fastest police car there and opened the siren wide as he hit the road.

Well ahead of him, radio cars had closed the streets and uniformed men were around the drug store. Kelly glanced at his watch. Not more than five minutes had passed since he had pronged the phone.

He entered the store and went directly to the bank of phone booths. He found the one matching the number of the wire the caller had used. Kelly felt the little overhead light bulb. It was still warm. He stepped out of the booth and closed the door. He sent a patrolman to call for fingerprint men to dust the booth and the instrument.

Kelly went up to the astounded druggist.

"Who used that phone five or six minutes ago and blew out in a big rush?" He asked.

"Why—it was a man." The druggist replied. "Just a man. Medium-sized. I didn't see his face."

"How was he dressed?" Killy was pleading for a lead. "Be careful now. He is a wanted murderer."

"Why, I think his suit was grey." The druggist said slowly. "Or maybe it was greyish green. He had on a brown hat. Yes, I'm sure of that. Light brown. A snap brim. That's all I remember."

"Okay," Kelly exhaled slowly. "I don't blame you, doc. That guy meant nothing to you. Thanks, anyhow."

HE HUNG around until the fingerprint boys arrived and reported negative results. Then he returned to headquarters, more disgusted and puzzled than ever. What had seemed to be a very simple case, had turned into a mighty tough one.

Captain Donahue had some news too.

"I talked to the D.A. and he says, in view of that phone call, we can't hold Nixon.

[*Turn page*]

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"Nixon did it," Kelly said stubbornly. "I know darned well he did it. I think, in some way, he flashed signals to a pal. This pal got the drift and made that phone call. It has to be that way. Not a soul except Nixon, you and I saw that note."

"If the guy on the phone wrote it, he saw it," Donahue said slowly.

"That note was written by Nixon," Kelly said adamantly. "While I banged on the door of the apartment he printed the note. The pen was wet and the ink on the paper had hardly dried. And I'm going to prove it."

"I don't see how, unless you make Nixon crack." Donahue wagged his ponderous white head. "Pat, couldn't you be wrong about him? How could he signal to anyone now?"

"There are ways," Kelly said. "Cap, will you get me someone familiar with Morse? Another man who can talk with his fingers and still another who can read lips. Nixon might have signalled by any one of those three methods. He had plenty of chances for that."

Donahue nodded.

"I'm willing to play ball up to a certain point, but if you find out he doesn't know any of these systems of signalling, I've got to let him out on bail, at least. He'll have a mouthpiece here in no time. We can't hold him more than twenty-four hours."

Kelly walked to the door.

"Keep the lawyer away from Nixon for a little longer, I want to try my experiment first." He said.

There were three experiments and none of them worked. They didn't get the slightest rise out of Nixon. The man who knew Morse was planted in a nearby cell and ordered to send signals, as if he were Nixon's pal. If Nixon heard the tapping, he paid no attention.

Then a man who could read sign language entered the cell room, presumably as a visitor to another prisoner. He wagged his fingers furiously and Nixon just gaped.

The lip reader went at him last and came away convinced that Nixon knew nothing about lip reading.

"Let him go," Kelly groaned. "Maybe if he's free, I can trip him better."

"It's our only chance, Pat," Captain Donahue agreed.

Kelly went out front to the desk sergeant and asked for Nixon's envelope of possessions. He went through these without finding anything of interest. But he noted, Nixon didn't seem to have too much money from the dunning bills in the folder.

Kelly fingered a gold key fitted to a thin gold chain. A Phi Beta Kappa key. He winked at the desk sergeant, gave the key a hard yank and broke open the link on the chain. He tucked the key into his pocket and prepared to leave the station.

Before he departed, Captain Donahue called and stated that Nixon was being allowed his freedom on bail. Kelly jammed on his hat and hurried to the apartment house where the murder had been committed.

As he pulled up in front, he saw a man lounging easily at the entrance, whom he recognized as a private detective named Danny Clark. Clark gave him a lazy salute.

"How's it coming—that kill?" he asked.

"Are you interested in it?" Kelly's voice was tinged with suspicion.

"Only because I happen to live in this building too." Clark said. "On the eighth floor. I knew Nixon slightly, but he certainly never struck me as being a killer. I knew Bergson too and that guy was a human rat. He had plenty of enemies."

"I'm glad I met you, Danny," Kelly said. "Perhaps you can give me a line on Bergson."

"I can tell you what I know." Clark seemed eager to talk. "Bergson and Nixon used to be partners in a jewelry appraising and sales business. They took gems on consignment and tried to peddle them. As I understand it, Nixon loafed too much and Bergson made all the dough. He finally got sore and heaved Nixon out."

"Nixon told me that himself." Kelly nodded. "What about these enemies?"

"Business enemies," Clark answered slowly. "Hatred caused by jealousy. Bergson was a shrewd dealer. I guess he put one over a few times. For actual blood-hating enemies, I can give you one man. The super of this apartment house. Name is MacDougal. About four months ago, Bergson accused him of swiping some stuff and they had a battle royal. MacDougal got the daylights whacked out of him. Then, a week ago, they had another fight and MacDougal came out about sixth by the looks of his puss."

"Thanks." Kelly said. "I'll look in on MacDougal. We haven't much on Nixon, you know."

"I thought you caught him cold." Clark shrugged. "Wish I could be of more help, Sarge. I don't envy you guys."

GRINNING briefly, Kelly went into the building and descended to the basement. MacDougal, it appeared, was a single man who occupied a furnished room in the basement. Kelly knocked, got no answer and used a skeleton key on the door.

Quite methodically and with the benefit of long experience, he began searching. He didn't quite know what he was looking for, but in a tin can in a tiny pantry locker, he found three medium-sized, uncut diamonds. He was studying these when the super came in, stood stock-still for a second, then dove for a heavy wrench that stood against the wall.

"Hold it," Kelly shouted. "Don't go for that wrench or I'll put a hole through you. I'm from the police."

MacDougal slowly released the massive pipe wrench he'd scooped up. He seemed to know what was coming. He looked quite old, with thin narrow shoulders that drooped low in his shabby jacket. He almost wilted when Kelly exposed the uncut gems.

"So Bergson's suspicion that you were a thief was right," Kelly accused.

"I—I bought them," MacDougal whined.

"Oh, you did! Fine! Tell me where." Kelly's voice was hard. "And at the same time, tell me what you want with uncut diamonds? You swiped these from gems that Bergson brought home from time to time. There's no safe in his apartment. He probably had a hiding place which you spotted. When you found out he was wise to your game you killed him."

"Killed him?" MacDougal's shoulders almost merged with his hips. "You don't think I did that. It was a man named Nixon. The police arrested him. . ."

"I arrested him," Kelly rapped, "and let him go a little while ago. Mac, tell me the truth, did you swipe these diamonds?"

MacDougal nodded miserably.

"But I swear I didn't kill him."

Kelly studied the man for a moment.

"Listen, Mac, I'm not going to haul you in. Not right away. But, so help me, if you try to leave this building, even to take a walk, you'll be grabbed before you reach

[*Turn page*]

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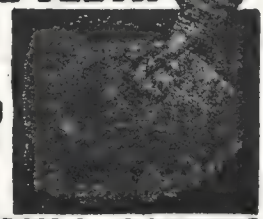

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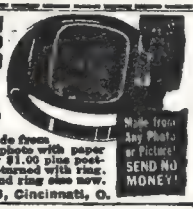

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the sidewalk. Now give me a master key to all the apartments in this place."

MacDougal silently handed the key to Kelly. A few moments later, the detective was in Bergson's suite.

He searched the rooms, inch by inch. He discovered the hiding place where Bergson concealed his jewels when caught with them after it was too late to return to his office. The hiding place was crude but effective. The telephone box, screwed to the wall, could be lifted out and behind it was a small recess. In it, Kelly discovered two velvet boxes, both containing jewelry of considerable value.

"Well, robbery wasn't the motive," he grunted.

He studied the outside of the window ledge, assuming that someone might have overheard his conversation with Nixon right after the killing. It occurred to him that Nixon had read that strange note out loud. Perhaps it was only a natural impulse on the part of the suspected man, but Kelly was missing nothing now. He telephoned the super and asked who lived in the apartments on either side of Bergson's.

"Mrs. Cunningham is on the north side," MacDougal stated. "She's about eighty-five years old. On the other side is a man named Logan. John Logan. He travels a lot and isn't home very much. Been there about six or eight months."

Kelly hung up. The old lady certainly had no connection with the crime and a man who was rarely at home probably didn't even know Bergson. Kelly frowned thoughtfully. He wondered if the walls were thin enough so that words could be heard through them. He called MacDougal again and sent him into the Logan apartment with orders to shout at the top of his voice. Kelly heard nothing.

An hour later he gave up. There was no apparent means by which anyone could have overheard his conversation with Nixon, much less known about the note. More and more, Kelly was forced to believe that the mysterious caller was telling the truth and yet, his doubts of Nixon's guilt didn't diminish.

Kelly took the fraternity key out of his pocket, dropped it on the floor and nudged it almost under the rug. Then he went down the hall and found Nixon already at home.

Nixon showed no animosity.

"I'll do everything I can to help you," he promised. "After all, it's for my own good. I don't think you were wrong for arresting me. In your place I'd have done the same thing."

"Thanks," Kelly said. "Suppose we go into Bergson's place and you can reenact exactly what you did before I showed up."

"I'll be very glad to." Nixon stepped out of his apartment and closed the door. They walked down the hall and entered the room where Bergson had died. Nixon looked at the floor in front of the desk and shuddered.

"Now," Kelly sat down behind the desk, "go into your routine."

NIXON went to the door, opened it and stepped into the hall. He closed the door part way, then stepped in again, as if he'd just seen the upturned toes of the dead man. He walked to the spot where the body had been found, stared down at it. Then he knelt and did a good act of pretending to grasp the handle of the knife. He moved slowly and deliberately. As he started to arise, Kelly banged the desk with his fist.

"Why—what's that?" Nixon cried, startled.

"Me—outside the door and wanting in. Remember?" Kelly ripped out.

"Oh. Oh, yes, of course." Nixon looked relieved.

Nixon half arose, hesitated a moment and then leaned far down again. When he straightened, his hand dipped into his side coat pocket. He walked very slowly toward the door, reached it and turned around. He raised both hands in an expressive gesture that this was the finish of the act.

"Good," Kelly said. "That took four minutes. Maybe you were slower this time, not being excited and all. Let it go. But I would like to see what you picked up from the edge of that rug."

"Picked up?" Nixon gasped. "I didn't pick anything—"

"Come on," Kelly chided. "I was watching you like a hawk. You don't have to feel reluctant, I know it's a fraternity key. I saw it before. That's why I asked you in here—to see if you'd try and cop it."

Kelly arose and walked over to Nixon. He took the key from his pocket and examined the gold chain that swung across Nixon's vest. Kelly seemed to study the link to which the key had been attached.

"Looks to me as if Bergson grabbed that key in trying to fight you off, Nixon." He said. "You got so flabbergasted that you forgot all about the key until you spotted it peeking at you from under the rug. Bergson

dropped it there during your tussle with him, knowing it would convict you. That key is numbered and could be traced to you. How about it?"

Nixon wrung his hands.

"I seem to get deeper and deeper," he whined. "Sergeant, again I say I did not kill Bergson. The key could have fallen off my chain as I bent over the body. I don't pretend to know how it got here. I don't even remember the last time I saw the key. I usually carry it with me, quite automatically. You know how those things are."

"Yeah," Kelly sighed. "Well, it looks like another trip downtown for you, my lad."

Nixon nodded. He didn't appear upset or nervous.

"I want this whole mess over with as much as you do, because I'm completely innocent."

Kelly marveling at Nixon's control took him back to Headquarters and filed another complaint. Then he informed Captain Donahue of his findings. Donahue was pessimistic.

"The key means something all right, but what?" He asked. "It only proves Nixon was there and he admits that."

"Sure," Kelly laughed. "Only Nixon didn't drop that key there. I did. I got it out of his possessions while he was locked up. When he tried to pick up the key and hide it, I knew he was our man."

Donahue looked toward the ceiling with a pious glance. "Planted evidence." He sighed. "What kind of a case can you concoct with that stuff. His lawyer will tear you to bits."

Kelly grinned.

"When I get the real stuff on Nixon, I won't need the key. Right now, I'm going to look up Bergson's office staff. It seems to me Bergson wasn't killed for hate only. There was something else. There usually is when the victim happens to be a jewelry dealer."

Kelly located Bergson's secretary and she agreed to meet him at the office. She was middle-aged, staid and super-efficient.

"Yes," she agreed, "Mr. Bergson often carried a fortune in gems with him. I warned him something like this would happen some day, but he was very sure of himself."

"What did he take with him the day he was killed?" Kelly asked.

She studied certain books and cards before she answered that one.

"Mr. Bergson took a string of genuine pearls, worth thirty thousand." She said after checking her cards. "He was to show them to a Mrs. Leonard at the Plaza. He also

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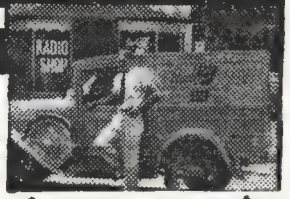

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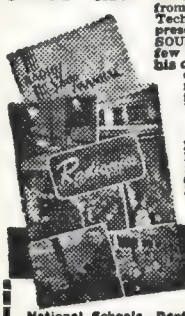

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had with him a bracelet of diamonds and rubies. Asssessed at seventy thousand. That was for a showing to a Mrs. Martin."

Kelly promptly phoned both women and learned that they'd had evening appointments with Bergson, but that he had not kept them. They were insistent that they had never seen the jewelry he had promised to bring.

"Good," Kelly told the secretary. "Now we have a motive because those rocks are not in Bergson's apartment. They were what the murderer was after."

IT WAS late, Kelly felt tired and there was little he could do. He went home to his neat hungalow where he lived alone. He mixed himself a highball, drank it with relish and scrambled some eggs. Over the eggs and toast, he considered the case from every angle and felt that in arresting Nixon he'd made no error.

Half an hour later, he was in bed, fast asleep. The voice seemed to come from a dozen places, calling his name over and over again. He responded to what he thought was a dream, by turning and tossing. Finally Kelly's eyes snapped wide open—and promptly closed again because a powerful light almost blinded him.

"Don't reach for a gun, Sergeant." The voice was tinny. "I'm not going to harm you. I'm right outside your window. All I want to do is talk."

Kelly knew where his gun was. He cursed himself for not putting it on the night table as usual. It hung, in its holster, over the back of a chair a dozen feet away.

"You have arrested Nixon again," the voice said. "What must I do to convince you he is innocent and I'm guilty?"

"Turn out that light so I can see you. Then give yourself up," Kelly snapped.

"But why should I?" the voice sounded different than when he had heard it over the phone. "You'll never find out who I am. It's Nixon I'm worried about. Sergeant, if you don't let that man go, I shall contact every newspaper in town and spill the whole story to them in detail. I'll tell them you refuse to accept my story even though you know it must be true.

"I had to have been in the room before

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you arrived, to know what was in the note, and to have seen the other things that I told you about."

"Did you see Nixon?" Kelly demanded. "Right after the murder?"

"Of course I did. I managed to reach the service doorway. He was coming along the hall with his head down. He didn't see or hear me."

"It's a good yarn." Kelly was growing used to the light. He slowly pushed the blankets down, so he could leap out of bed and go for his gun.

"There's only one thing wrong with it." Kelly continued. "Nixon dropped a fraternity key in that room. He saw it today and tried to get it back."

"A fraternity key?" Kelly wondered why the voice was so tinny. "Why, that's odd. Bergson had a fraternity key on his desk. I remember seeing it. I wondered about it because Bergson never went to college. It must have been Nixon's. Maybe Bergson picked it up somewhere. At any rate, that key was on the edge of his desk when I killed him. It's a small, flat gold key with numbers on it."

"You're a genius," Kelly grunted.

If that guy had a gun, there was going to be fireworks. Kelly leaped out of bed, streaked to the chair and got his gun free. He fired two shots straight through the open window. All he got for his pains was a raucous laugh. A moment later, a car motor roared to life, then disappeared into the night.

Kelly raced to the window. A flashlight rested on the sill beside a small loud speaker and a wire trailed out of the window. Kelly hurried out the door, winced as bare feet hit cold pavements, and made his way around the house to the window. He traced the wire to a tiny microphone which the self-confessed murderer had talked into.

Kelly hefted the mike in the palm of his hand and his eyes narrowed. He hurried back to the house, donned his clothes and drove straight to Bergson's apartment. He let himself in, started searching again and gave up half an hour later. It was no use. His hunch was all wrong. He examined the radio very carefully. There was no mike planted there, no mysterious wire running off into the wall someplace. Just the regular tubes and the socket wire, nothing else.

He cursed roundly and wondered if he was a complete fool. On impulse, he stepped into

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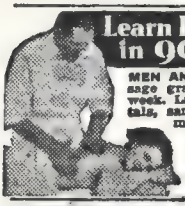

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the hall and went to the next door apartment of the traveling man. He let himself in with the super's key and turned on the lights.

The apartment was nicely furnished. It was spotless and dustless, indicating that no one had lived there for a long time. He opened several bureau drawers. They were empty. He investigated the kitchen. There wasn't even a package of spaghetti or a bottle of rye. Nothing at all.

Kelly bent down and examined the wall board between this room and the one where Bergson had died. There was an electic light socket with a plug in it. The wire from this led to a small end table on which a lamp stood. He tried to turn on this lamp, but it wouldn't work. He tested the bulb and found it was in good condition. Kelly knelt again and yanked the plug out of its socket. It came out freely, dragging an additional length of wire with it.

Kelly hurried down to the janitor's place, after replacing the socket and removing all signs of his intrusion. He knew the answer to the case now.

MacDOUGAL was awakened only with considerable effort. Kelly told him no one was to enter Bergson's apartment under any circumstances. There were some new clues. One thing about MacDougal, Kelly was sure of—he'd tell everyone interested in the case all the latest developments.

In the morning, with Captain Donahue, several detectives, the D.A., Nixon and his attorney, Kelly filled the murder room and sat himself down behind the desk.

"We have here," he said, "a man whom I almost apprehended in the very act of murder. Also a nameless voice. Just a voice on a telephone or a microphone. The voice of a man who confessed to the crime for which Nixon is being held. If that man had come forth, the whole thing would be over. He hasn't. In fact, he refuses to so we have to continue holding Nixon."

"I didn't know anyone confessed to the crime," Nixon's attorney shouted. "Now you have to let my client go."

"Do I?" Kelly grunted. He arose, walked over and put a hand on the surface of the cabinet radio. Suddenly he bent down.

"One, two, three, four," he said. "One, two, three, four. Testing. Testing. How is it coming through this morning, Mr. Danny Clark?"

"What the devil?" Donahue shouted. "Have you gone bats?"

"I got smart last night," Kelly grinned. "Concealed in this radio is a mike disguised as a tube. One of those kind with a metal screen, full of holes, around it. Only it's a mike, not a tube. The mike wire is cleverly enclosed with the power wire under the same insulation. The power wire seems to be plugged into the wall socket, but it goes through to the next apartment.

"There the wire separates. One section goes to pick up current. The other to carry any sounds made in this room to some ear phones. Are you listening, Danny Clark?"

"What's this Danny Clark stuff?" Donahue's face was heavy with wonder.

"I'm talking to Danny Clark, the private ear, right now." Kelly said. "He's in the next room listening to everything being said in here. Danny and Nixon are in cahoots. This mike was installed so they could listen in on Bergson and find out when he brought home gems that were worth murder."

Donahue and the D. A. stared as Kelly unfolded the almost perfect crime. Nixon's face was an ashy grey and his shoulders slumped.

"Bergson had the gems yesterday." Kelly continued. "Nixon came in to do the dirty work. Bergson knew him, so naturally he didn't expect anything. But when Nixon went at him, Bergson put up a fight. He flung the bookend at Nixon just before Nixon plunged the knife into his chest.

"Nixon passed the jewels to Clark and then stayed behind a moment to be certain that Bergson was really dead, and that they hadn't left any clues. Clark went into the next apartment. Then I showed up and Nixon knew that he was trapped. He called Clark and told him what to do, then wrote the note and went into his act.

"It was good, I'll admit, because I couldn't figure out how the voice, Danny Clark's of course, could have known these things."

"Then, last night, Danny gave the whole show away. He planted a little speaker on my window sill and talked into a mike. Danny had two reasons for using that speaker system. He was afraid I might plug him and it helped to disguise his voice."

"Somebody get Danny Clark," Donahue yelled.

"He's got," Kelly chuckled. "I planted cops in the hall. Danny can take a dry dive if he wants, but he won't. And, Danny, are you

[*Turn page*]

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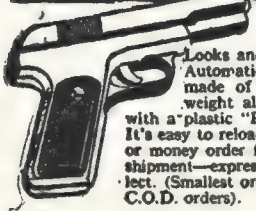

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listening? That system you used at my house was the tip-off—private dicks are great ones for listening systems, so I guessed it was you. It also told me how you'd gotten all that information only Nixon and I knew. I really looked for a mike this time—and I found it. Are you coming out of there, Danny?"

"I'm out." Clark spoke from the doorway where he was flanked by two big policemen. "I always said this was a crazy idea. We should have killed you when you found Nixon locked in with the corpse."

Nixon gave a wild yell of sudden terror, but he didn't try to escape. Kelly thought it was because his legs were paralyzed by fear.

HEADQUARTERS

(Continued from page 6)

Morf thinks this statement odd, because how did the girl know Shand is dead? She is held for questioning.

At the inquest, Doris admits she helped bring Shand up to his room. In this task she was aided by Kereff, the bellboy. Kereff backs up the blonde's statement. He further adds that he went to the house physician to get some sleeping tablets for Mr. Gardiner, the psalm-singing occupant of the room next door.

We have already spoken of Jenkins' foggy mental condition. The photographer doesn't really know exactly where he was at the time of the crime. At least he hasn't the five grand on him—yet he could have spent it. So here we have a complete line-up of suspects, each of whom has a definite motive for putting the quietus on the champion bowler.

It is up to Dwight Berke, known to his friends as "Di", to pitch in and play detective. There is his pal's liberty at stake, plus the reputation of an up-and-coming blond singer, who also loves his pal.

You'll never guess who committed the crime. You'll never guess to what strange uses a bowling-ball can be put. You'll like "Di" Berke and all his friends and you'll like one corking story.

The Mysterious Message

Next on the list of headliners for next issue is MEET THE KILLER, by John L. Benton.

The splendid stories that John L. Benton has turned out for us are far too numerous to mention. Speaking, as we were a few moments ago, of likable heroes, you've never met up with one that you'll think more of than Johnny Blake, reporter on the Newton *Globe*.

Blake is sitting at his typewriter, clicking away, when the office boy, Mickey Webb, comes to him with a mysterious message. There is a man outside who insists on seeing Blake. No—he won't say what his business is. Blake goes out and meets the fellow, who won't give his name. The visitor has hard and cruel eyes. They go into an empty office for a private confab. Here is the proposition he puts before Blake:

A certain Charlie Collins is about to burn in the electric chair in a couple of days. Collins has been convicted of killing a night-club dame by the name of Babs Dawson.

The man with the hard eyes tells Blake that Collins didn't kill the girl. He knows who did do the killing and can prove it. For a thousand dollars he will tell Blake who the guilty person is—but not here.

Blake thinks the whole thing over. Why should he stick his neck out? Just for an exclusive story for his paper? But Collins, like Blake, is an ex-service man. A mysterious rendezvous is arranged.

Blake finally decides not to tell his paper anything about the matter. He draws a thousand dollars out of his own savings. Of course, the whole thing looks phony. Alone and unarmed, Blake goes to an ill-smelling, ramshackle house. There is no one on the first, second or third floors. Apparently the house is deserted. On the fourth floor, Blake again meets the man with the hard eyes.

Blake now hears from this character, that

[*Turn page*]

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Charlie Collins, the man doomed to die, was framed. Blake, convinced now, hands the man the thousand dollars. From somewhere there comes a hissing, coughing sound. Between those hard, cruel eyes, appears a bullet hole. Someone has shot the man, with a gun equipped with a silencer!

Things are further complicated when Blake is hit on the head and rendered unconscious. He is awakened by the shrieking of sirens. The police barge in. There is a revolver on the floor. Blake is accused of killing the man with the hard eyes. How, now, is he going to save Charlie Collins from the electric chair, when it looks as if he were headed there himself?

How Johnny Blake gets out of this terrific jam, naturally, we have no intention of letting you know. We don't want to spoil your enjoyment of a thrill-packed story. There's something doing every minute in MEET THE KILLER. Look forward to it!

Music, Moonlight and—Death

The third novelet on next month's roster is THE TRIANGULAR BLADE, by Carter Sprague. And it's a smashing humdinger!

How would you like to be a guest at an evening lawn party, on an exclusive Long Island estate? There is moonlight, soft music and the waiting arms of the girl you love.

Suddenly you see the glow of a cigarette stub in the grass, a few yards away. You excuse yourself and go to put out the offending butt. It could cause a fire. You reach out to tread on the still-glowing cigarette. Startled, you see, lying upon the grass, the dead body of a beautiful girl!

That is exactly what happens to Jimmy Grey and Dawn Barton, on the magnificent estate of Olin Wade, tycoon of Laketown, where they are guests. The dead girl turns out to be Anne Lewis, also a guest at the party. Between the shoulder-blades of her lowcut evening gown, there protrudes a vicious-looking pie-knife. Who has committed this grim crime?

That's the problem in THE TRIANGULAR BLADE—and the intricacies and ramifications of the subtle plot that runs through this sophisticated novelet of sophisticated people will hold you spellbound from start to finish! This is an unusual mystery, with a twist at the end that will leave you gasping!

Get aboard the Carter Sprague bandwagon for a swell yarn!

Naturally there will be, in addition to these three great headlines, our usual treasury of short stories for your entertainment. All in all, folks, you may confidently expect one of the best issues of THRILLING DETECTIVE to date!

WORD FROM OUR READERS

LETTERS from out readers continue to pile in at a great rate. It is sometimes extremely difficult to select the letters of most interest to our readers. But we try to quote from the most typical missives. Here is one letter we considered especially thought-provoking:

Sometimes your writers give us stories with situations, trades, occupations, etc., about which they know little or nothing. For instance, if an author writes a story about a carpenter, he should know, at least, a little something about carpenters—the terms they use, how their work affects them and so on. The same applies to fisherman, or sailors, salesman—and I could go on indefinitely.

That is what I liked about your story "The Second Act is Murder." I don't know if Mr. W. T. Ballard was ever connected with the theater; but this thriller, with the locale placed in a summer stock company, at least *sounds* authentic. Also let me congratulate author Fergus Truslow on his "trouper" lingo in the short story, "Slay That Hoofer Down." I could get a good whiff of the grease-paint. This story, incidentally, was in the same issue.

Nice going on both stories.

—*Alan J. McCarthy, New Haven, Conn.*

Thank you Mr. McCarthy. Usually our authors are well acquainted with the subjects on which they write. Furthermore, our staff checks all stories for authenticity. You'd be surprised at the number of problems that come up in the course of a day. Very often there is a considerable difference of opinion.

Here's a missive from way out in old Wyomin' that sort of warms the cockles of our heart. Let the letter speak for itself:

Please, what has happened to Johnny Castle? We have not seen hide or hair of him since "Murder off the Record"? Don't tell me he's been drafted or has suddenly developed into a baseball pitcher and is down South training with the Dodgers? We like the famous reporter-detective of the *Orbit* out this way. His stories are always full of pep.

—*Walter C. Smith, Laramie, Wyo.*

Muchas gracias, Mr. Smith, as we say in Spanish. Johnny has always been a favorite of ours too. There will be more stories about this popular sleuth in forthcoming issues.

Now, let's listen to a gentleman from the South—the South, that is—who likes us a lot:

I think THRILLING DETECTIVE is the best magazine of its kind on the market. I enjoy every issue and each one seems better than the one that has gone before. Keep up the good work.

—*Wm. T. McEnery, Corpus Christi, Tex.*

And thanks to you too, kind sir!

Let's keep those letters and postcards streaming in. Please address them to The Editor, THRILLING DETECTIVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York, 16, N. Y. We appreciate your comments, criticisms and suggestions—and you may be sure every communication is given the fullest attention.

Happy reading to everybody—see you all next month!

—THE EDITOR.

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Just out—very latest guaranteed, simple, easy method. Play cowboy songs the Western way in a few minutes by ear. Surprise and amaze your friends. Be in big demand at *parties, camps, public entertainments, on the radio, etc.* 12 Complete Lessons. SEND NO MONEY. Pay postman only $1.00 plus postage and C.O.D. charges, or send $1.00 and get EXTRA SONGS all postpaid. (Canada, $1.25 money order only.) Nothing else to buy. Positive *money back guarantee. Rush order today.*

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Free for Asthma

If you suffer with attacks of Asthma so terrible you choke and gasp for breath, if restful sleep is impossible because of the struggle to breathe, if you feel the disease is slowly wearing your life away, don't fail to send at once to the Frontier Asthma Co. for a free trial of a remarkable method. No matter where you live or whether you have any faith in any remedy under the Sun, send for this free trial. If you have suffered a lifetime and tried everything you could learn of without relief; even if you are utterly discouraged, do not abandon hope but send today for this free trial. It will cost you nothing. Address:

FRONTIER ASTHMA CO.
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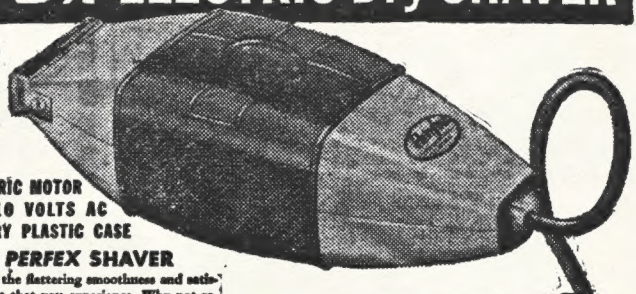
Here it is! AT AN ELECTRIFYING LOW PRICE

THE NEW AND BETTER *Perfex* ELECTRIC Dry SHAVER

$3.95 POST PAID

COMPLETE WITH TRAVEL KIT

a Gift He Will Truly Appreciate



- ★ INCLUDES PLUG-IN CORD
- ★ SUPER-KEEN CUTTING HEAD
- ★ RUBBERIZED HAND GRIP
- ★ HEAVY-DUTY ELECTRIC MOTOR
- ★ OPERATES ON 110 VOLTS AC
- ★ STREAMLINED IVORY PLASTIC CASE

DO YOUR FACE A FAVOR...WITH A *PERFEX* SHAVER

Now you can own the new and better PERFEX Electric Dry Shaver for only $3.95. So why continue to take shaving discomfort on the chin. Whisk your whiskers away in the modern manner—quickly and efficiently. Introduce your beard (tough as it may be) to the dynamic, *Super-Keen* cutting head of a PERFEX shaver. You'll be truly electrified at the flattering smoothness and satisfying comfort that you experience. Why not retire your old "horse-and-buggy" razor and send for your miraculous new PERFEX Electric Shaver today. If you don't feel that it's everything we say it is, return it to us within 5 days and we'll cheerfully refund your full purchase price.

MAIL THIS COUPON TODAY

IMPERIAL INDUSTRIES—Dept. E29
Perfex Electric Div., 618 So. Dearborn St., Chicago, Ill.
Rush my Perfex Electric Dry Shaver at $3.95 with handsome travel case personalized in Gold. If not completely satisfied I may return it within 5 days for refund.
Name Wanted in Gold _____ (Please Print)

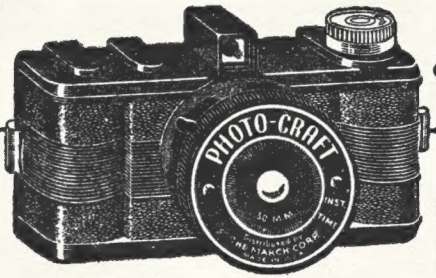
CHECK ONE

☐ Am enclosing $3.95 in full payment. Please send my Perfex Shaver postpaid.
☐ Send my Perfex Shaver C.O.D. I am enclosing $1.00 deposit because I want my travel case personalized in GOLD. I'll pay postman balance of $2.95 plus postage.
☐ Send my Perfex Shaver C.O.D. without name on travel case. I will pay postman $3.95 plus postage.

Name _____ (Please Print Clearly)
Address _____
City _____ Zone _____ State _____

INCLUDED AT NO EXTRA COST
Personalized TRAVEL CASE
WITH YOUR NAME IN 23-Kt. GOLD

COMPLETE 5-PIECE CANDID CAMERA OUTFIT

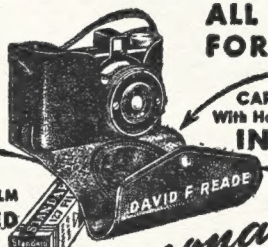


Includes all This!

- ★ GENUINE PHOTOCRAFT CANDID Type CAMERA
- ★ CARRYING CASE with Your Name in 23-Kt. GOLD
- ★ 3 ROLLS of No. 127 FILM

ALL YOURS FOR ONLY $3.98 POST PAID

CARRYING CASE With Handy Shoulder Strap INCLUDED



THREE ROLLS OF FILM INCLUDED

LOOK AT THESE FEATURES

- ★ Genuine Simpson Ground and Pitch Polished Lens
- ★ Takes 16 Pictures on Any Standard No. 127 Film
- ★ Will Take Pictures in Full Color
- ★ Has "Bullseye" Level View Finder
- ★ Easy, Simple, Foolproof Operation

Personalized WITH YOUR NAME IN 23-Kt. Gold

PICTURES YOU TAKE TODAY WITH THIS BIG 3-IN-1 OUTFIT WILL BE THE TREASURES OF TOMORROW

. . . For while time stands still for no one, the memories of happy times can be preserved by Photocraft. Your Photocraft candid camera outfit comes to you ready to go to work—with a handy shoulder strap carrying case Personalized with the name of your choice in 23-Kt. GOLD, *and* enough film for 48 exposures—for only $3.98 postpaid! Your Photocraft will also take full color pictures when loaded with Colorchrome film. So whether for a gift or for yourself, order *your* Complete 5-piece Photocraft Outfit *now!* Our guarantee is your assurance of satisfaction.

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Yes, if you don't feel that Photocraft is everything you expected, you may return it in 10 days for a complete refund.

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618 South Dearborn St., Chicago 5, Ill.
Rush my Photocraft Candid Camera Outfit at $3.98 with Personalized Carrying Case and 3 rolls of No. 127 Film. My money will be refunded if returned in 10 days.
Name Wanted in Gold _____ (Please Print)

CHECK ONE

☐ I'm enclosing $3.98 in full payment. Please send my Photocraft Outfit Postpaid.
☐ Send my Photocraft C.O.D. I am enclosing $1.00 deposit because I want my Carrying Case Personalized in GOLD. I'll pay postman balance of $2.98 plus postage.
☐ Send my Photocraft C.O.D. without name on Carrying Case. I will pay postman $3.98 plus postage.

Name _____ (Please Print Clearly)
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IN OLD SACRAMENTO
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WILLIAM ELLIOTT and CONSTANCE MOORE
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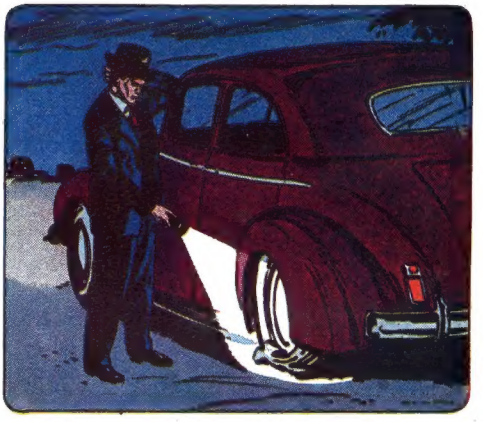
Frances Hyland • Adaptation by Frank Gruber
Original Story by Jerome Odlum
Associate Producer & Director - Joseph Kane
A REPUBLIC PICTURE

How to

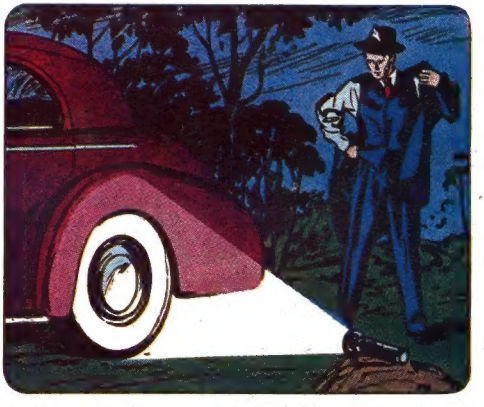
CHANGE A TIRE AT NIGHT...

More Quickly—More Safely!



1 Most any motorist can change a tire. But few can change it at night with top speed, efficiency — and *safety!* Night tire-changing can be hazardous — but "Eveready" flashlights can reduce the danger. First principle, says the American Automobile Assn., is...

2 Park *off* the highway. Next best place is on a *straight* stretch of road. If you must park on a curve, a light should be set on the road some distance back. Be sure neither you nor a bystander blocks off the view of your tail-light!



3 Keep all your tire-changing tools tied or boxed *together,* where you can pick them up without searching or fumbling. Remove your spare before jacking up car — tugging might push car off jack. If alone, set flashlight on a stone in convenient position.

4 In your car or at home — wherever you need a flashlight — rely on "Eveready" batteries. Ask for them by name. "Eveready" batteries have no equals... that's why you'll find them in *more* flashlights than any other battery in the world!

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EXTRA POWER, EXTRA LIFE —AT NO EXTRA COST